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ABSTRACT

This course, one of 16 sequential courses comprising phase one of a part-time Bachelor of Arts degree program in Australian Studies, examines a number of theoretical approaches to the study of language, particularly those which place language in a social context. It is designed for independent study combined with tutorial sessions. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the course and its study objectives. Chapter 2, "Language as System," deals with structural linguistics and the views of de Saussure. Chapter 3, "Structuralism," covers structural analysis of myth and popular fiction as well as the limits of structuralism. Chapter 4, "Language and Social Relations," place linguistics in its social context. Chapter 5, "Interviewing as Social and Cultural Practice," describes the varieties and forms of interviewing, and interviewing as communication. Chapter 6, "Television Interviews," deals with television interviewing as performance and difficulties this causes. The conclusion argues against the existence of a general theory of language; instead, particular practices and differences are emphasized. Also included are lists of required readings, additional readings, a bibliography, and self-assessment questions. (IS)

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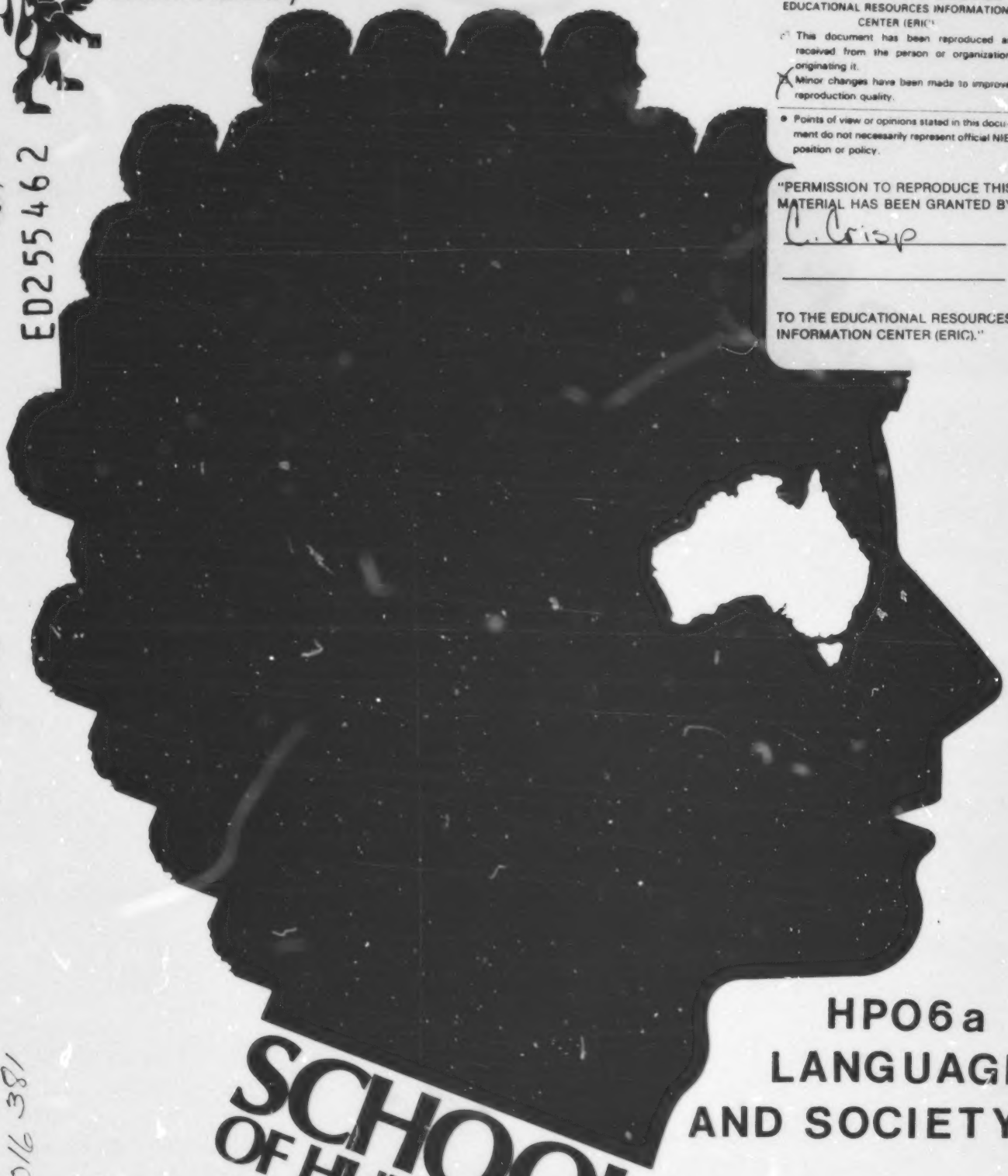

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

HPO6a LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

SP016 381

PART TIME BA DEGREE

GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

PART-TIME BA DEGREE PROGRAMME

COURSE HP06a

LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

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COURSE INFORMATION: HP06a

Course organisation

This course consists of two main parts. The first part, consisting of sections 1 to 4, introduces a number of contrasting approaches to the study of language and discusses their relative strengths and weaknesses. It also considers the respects in which the study of language is of relevance to a number of broader debates within the social and cultural sciences societies more generally. The second part of the course then goes on to illustrate these more general concerns by examining the forms of language use associated with a range of different interview situations.

Study notes

This course differs somewhat from earlier courses in terms of the teaching devices it uses and, correspondingly, its lay-out also. The course is organised around a number of readings with the study guide performing the role of commenting on and linking these readings. For the most part, this commentary is contained in the main body of the study guide. SAQs have been set only in one or two places. However, in the case of each reading, a set of questions has been provided. You should try to answer these as you work through the reading concerned and then review your answers in the light of the comments which follow on immediately after each reading. In effect, therefore, answers to questions on readings have been incorporated into the main body of the study guide rather than being placed at the back.

It is also worth mentioning that, owing to the subject matter of the course, you will encounter some fairly unfamiliar terms derived from linguistics. Don't let these put you off your stride. They form a part of a technical vocabulary which is no more and no less complicated than any other vocabulary of a similar nature. As some of these terms are ones you will be using later in your studies, it would be a good idea to make a brief note of their meaning for future reference.

Whilst there is no set text for the course, you will be asked to read a small excerpt from Paul Hirst and Penny Woolley, *Social Relations and Human Attributes*, which you should have purchased for use in association with Course HP03b, *Authorship*.

Assessment items

The assessment for this course is divided into two parts. In the first, a short essay, you will be asked to review and comment on selected aspects of the different approaches to the study of language discussed in the course. There are a number of questions for you to choose from here. In the

second, you will be asked to comment on a transcript of an interview from the television show *Parkinson in Australia* in the light of the perspectives developed in sections 5 and 6 of the course. This is included with the course readings and is marked Interview B.

Tutorial activities

The tutorials for this course are intended to serve two purposes. The first will review the various theories of language discussed in sections 1 to 4 of the course. In clarifying any difficulties you may have encountered in relation to these, this tutorial will help you in preparing the first part of the assessment item.

The second tutorial is intended to give you the opportunity to apply the perspectives developed in sections 5 and 6 of the course. This will take the form of a group analysis of an interview similar to the one you are asked to comment on in the second part of the assessment item. This interview, between Michael Parkinson and Malcolm Fraser, is marked Interview C (reading 16). You should bring this with you to the tutorial.

LIST OF READINGS

Readings are numbered in order of use, and aggregated according to the section of the study guide in which they first appear.

The excerpt from Paul Hirst and Penny Woolley, *Social Relations and Human Attributes*, is not listed here.

Section 1 (pink cover)

Reading 1. Allison James, 'Confections, concoctions and conceptions' (excerpts)

Section 2 (cream cover)

Reading 2. Jonathan Culler, 'Saussure's theory of language' (excerpts)

Reading 3. Jean Itard, 'Report on the progress of Victor of Aveyron' (excerpts)

Section 3 (yellow cover)

Reading 4. E.F. Watling, 'The Theban legend'

Reading 5. Claude Levi-Strauss, 'The structural study of myth' (excerpts)

Reading 6. Umberto Eco, 'The narrative structure in Fleming' (excerpt)

Reading 7. Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond: Fiction, Ideology and Social Process* (excerpt)

Section 4 (blue cover)

Reading 8. V.N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (excerpts)

Reading 9. William Labov, 'The logic of nonstandard English' (excerpts)

Section 5 (mauve cover)

Reading 10. Mark Benney and Everett C. Hughes, 'Of sociology and the interview' (excerpts)

Reading 11. Gillian Dyer, 'Teaching about television interviews' (excerpt)

Reading 12. Interview A

Reading 13. Stuart Hall, Ian Connell and Lidia Curti, 'The "unity" of current affairs television' (excerpts)

Reading 14. John Langer, 'Television's "personality system"' (excerpts)

Assessment Item (red cover)

Reading 15. Interview B

Tutorial Reading (orange cover)

Reading 16. Interview C

1 INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE AND ITS STUDY OBJECTIVES

1.1 Language as a social practice: an example

Our purpose in this course is to introduce you to a range of contemporary debates concerning the nature of language, the way it works and the effects which might be attributed to it. In doing so, we shall be particularly concerned with the contribution which the study of language may make to our understanding of the ways in which other forms of cultural activity - some of them based on language, some of them not - are patterned and organised. We shall also explore the ways in which such activities are conditioned by and, in their turn, condition the social relations which prevail between those who take part in them.

To this end, we shall favour a particular view of language, one which argues that the mechanisms of language and its effects can be properly understood only by examining different forms of language use in the light of the social relations which regulate the exchanges and transactions between speakers and listeners, or between writers and readers. As a corollary of this view, we shall also argue that, in their own turn, such variable patterns of language use actively produce and organise speakers and listeners, writers and readers, in particular relationships to one another with particular consequences for the nature of the interactions between them. These views will be contrasted with approaches which argue that language can be understood, in a more abstract way, as consisting of a body of rules which organises the activities of language users in fixed and uniform ways no matter what the particular nature of the social relations between them.

However, rather than, at this point, stating these objectives in greater detail or outlining what is involved in pursuing them, we would like you to start your work for the course by considering an analysis of a particular form of language use. The problem which Allison James addresses in her article 'Confections, concoctions and conceptions' is a very concrete and particular one: that of the diametrically opposed range of meanings associated with the same word - kets, a slang expression used mainly in the north east of England - depending on whether it is used by adults or by children. The explanation of this apparent contradiction, however, is made possible only by means of James's implicit use of some rather abstract theoretical perspectives which, in due course, we shall make explicit with a view to expanding on and developing them further. By considering this example and highlighting the issues which it gives rise to, it will then be possible to formulate our objectives in ways that will be more meaningful to you.

****

Read Allison James, 'Confections, concoctions and conceptions' (excerpts), reading 1. In doing so, try to answer the following questions:

1. What, according to James, are the different meanings of the work kets?

2. How would you characterise the relations between these different meanings?

3. In what ways does James take social considerations into account in her approach to language use?

4. In what sense, according to James, can sweet eating be regarded as a form of cultural activity, and one worth taking seriously?

5. Can you think of any other words which function similarly to kets in the range of contradictory meanings they exhibit?

****

Comments

1. Both the denotative and the connotative meanings of the term kets vary. Depending on whether it is used by adults or children, it denotes - that is, roughly speaking, stands for or refers to - different concepts, rubbish in one case, a particular type of sweet in the other. Its functioning at the connotative level - that is, at the level of the additional meanings it carries or which are habitually associated with it - is both more complex and more interesting. These associations, in the case of adult usage, are exclusively negative - something smelly, unpleasant or rotten. What happens in the usage of children is not so much that these associations are absent as that they are transformed in being slid across from a negative to a positive pole of evaluation. The sweets referred to as kets are highly valued precisely because they are smelly, sticky, gooey, rubbishy and so on.

2. Children's usage of the term kets is not merely different from adult usage; it is its opposite. Moreover, this meaning is produced by means of a transformation of adult usage, one which subjects the adult world of values - as ordered in language - to a systematic inversion.

3. The respects in which James's approach to language use is informed by a social perspective can perhaps best be illustrated by contrasting it with other possible approaches to the same problem. First, she does not adopt a normative position: that is, she does not seek

to privilege one use of kets above the other or to legislate that only one is allowable usage. Nor is her approach unduly historical: she does not seek to explain contemporary usage by tracing it back to its roots in some earlier usage. To the contrary, contemporary usage is construed as a metaphoric extension of the term's earliest recorded use - referring to meat of a particular type - rather than being in any way tied down to or limited by that original meaning. Instead, James seeks to explain the variability of contemporary usage and its contradictions by examining the functioning of the term within the language activities of children in the light of the social relations which regulate the exchanges between children and adults. Moreover, she places her analysis of such conflicting language use in the context of a broader analysis of the implicit rules and conventions which structure and order the eating behaviour and preferences of adults and children. Kets, in the vocabulary of children, functions as a way of marking a system of preferences - the preference for highly coloured sweets as opposed to the subdued tones of adult confectionery, the preference for tangy and explosive flavours over smooth or mellow ones, a preference for eating between rather than at meal times - which, in most respects, inverts adult preferences. In this way, children's usage of the term kets functions as a linguistic marker of a separately constructed cultural enclave within which children symbolically evade the imposition of adult dietary values by turning those values upside down.

4. James approaches food-eating as an ordered activity governed by a variety of cultural codes and conventions which specify the forms of food which may be permissibly combined with one another, and which may not, specify the sequence in which they should be eaten and so on. Another way of putting this might be to say that she approaches eating as a cultural activity governed by rules which might be likened to the rules of grammar which regulate language use. A breach of such rules might therefore, to carry the analogy further, be likened to bad grammar. Eating the sweets James describes thus constitutes a breach with the grammar which regulates adult eating customs, whereas calling such sweets kets is to flaunt - to highlight by means of a paraded inversion of adult language usage - such 'subversive' behaviour.

5. Other examples? Well, there are lots of them, instances in which a given word or expression functions at two levels simultaneously, giving rise to one set of meanings in its most habituated usage and to quite another when, in other uses, its predominant associations are bent back against themselves to produce a differently inflected set of meanings. Gays, for example, have scandalised would-be guardians of the

English language precisely by calling themselves gays, a linguistic move which permits the formation of more positive forms of self-estimation and identity in producing a new set of associations - of lightness and innocence - for a form of sexuality previously definable only as a perversity. At the same time, of course, this new usage does not leave the old usage unaffected: the word gay is simply no longer available to be used as if it could be severed from the new associations which gay language has produced for it. The sentence 'He is a gay boy' now means something that it once did not and, more important, whatever the speaker's intentions, can no longer mean just or quite what it once meant.

In itself, of course, the example of kets is a relatively slight and inconsequential instance of the relations between language and society. Yet it has served its purpose in taking us, already, some way into the concerns of the course. Perhaps rather more important, it can help us, now, to explain why we should want you to study language in the first place. It is worth dwelling a little on this point, particularly if, from your earlier educational experience, you regard the study of language as a dry and dusty topic, a narrow specialism of interest only to philologists, grammarians and lexicographers. This view, whilst understandable enough, fails to take account of the important place that the study of language has always occupied in western thought. Questions concerning the properties of language, the rules governing its use and construction and its effects have consistently pre-occupied philosophers, from Aristotle onwards, particularly in their attempts to determine the nature of the relationships which exist between thought and reality, with language frequently cast in the role of go-between between the two. The study of language continues to be deeply involved in such questions. However, in the course of the twentieth century - and especially the last twenty to thirty years - general interest in and the significance of the study of language has expanded enormously. This has mainly been as a result of the view that many different forms of social and cultural activity can be studied as if they were organised like a language - a view which, as we have seen, partly informs Allison James's approach to the analysis of dietary customs.

The roots of this view are traceable to Ferdinand de Saussure, whose *Course in General Linguistics*, a series of lectures he delivered in Geneva between 1906 and 1911 and which was posthumously published in book form, is widely regarded as constituting one of the founding texts of modern linguistics. We shall consider some aspects of Saussure's work shortly. Suffice it to say here that Saussure's distinctive contribution to the study of language - which he conceived as a system for the production and communication of meaning - consisted in his contention that the various sound patterns of which language is comprised mean what they do, when combined into words and sentences, by virtue of the relations which exist between them rather than because of

any natural or intrinsic bond between such sound patterns, conceived individually, and the external world to which they refer. According to this view, the relations between the various units of language constitute a structure which, although abstract and hidden from view, is nonetheless real in its effects in the sense that it organises not only the speech of language users but, as we shall see, their consciousness too. More immediately relevant to our concerns here is the fact that Saussure envisaged that his work on language might pave the way for and ultimately form a part of a broader science, semiology, whose concern would be to study the make up and effects of all systems of signs:

> A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology (from the Greek semeion 'sign'). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance. Linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology; the laws discovered by semiology will be applicable to linguistics, and the latter will circumscribe a well-defined area within the mass of anthropological facts. (Saussure, 1966, p.16)

Whilst Saussure's expectation has been realised, the development of semiology - a science of the life of signs in society - did not, at least in its early phases, follow quite the path Saussure anticipated. As can be seen from the above, Saussure envisaged that the study of language would form merely a subsidiary component within the broader science of semiology. Contrary to this expectation, however, when Saussure's theories were first taken up by scholars working outside the sphere of linguistics proper, the study of language was held to provide the key to the study of all other systems of signs and, in some formulations, to the study of all forms of social behaviour and organisation too. Semiology thus became a sub-branch of linguistics rather than the other way round.

For Saussure, as we have seen, the activity of language users is organised by a hidden structure and, for this reason, the school of linguistics he founded is usually called structural linguistics. The view that methods of analysis developed in relation to the study of language may be used to analyse other systems of signs - an extension justified by the contention that they can be regarded as being organised like a language in the sense that they are governed by a set of rules analagous to a grammar - has, consequently, been called structuralism. Its most influential proponent, perhaps, has been the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss for whom language, in distinguishing human from animal life, is the very prototype of all cultural phenomena. To the degree that language

provides the means whereby all forms of social behaviour and organisation are established and perpetuated, Levi-Strauss argued, its study is of decisive methodological significance for all the human sciences. The question Levi-Strauss asked, and which he answered in the affirmative, was:

> Whether the different aspects of social life (including even art and religion) cannot only be studied by the methods of, and with the help of concepts similar to those employed in linguistics, but also whether they do not constitute phenomena whose innermost nature is the same as that of language. (Levi-Strauss, 1972, p.353)

It is, then, via the influence of structuralism - which we might define as a method of analysis using techniques generalised from linguistics to study the make up and organisation of diverse cultural phenomena and patterns of social behaviour and organisation - that the study of language, far from being a narrowly specialised area, has come to exert an enormous influence on contemporary debates in the social sciences and humanities. It has influenced the work of literary theorists who have approached literary texts of various sorts not only as self evidently using language but as being language-like in their organisation. It has also exerted a significant influence on the work of sociologists and anthropologists who, following the example of Levi-Strauss, have examined a wide range of social customs and rituals - dietary customs and manners, rules of dress and burial rites, for example - as well as certain forms of social organisation, such as the rules governing the lines of descent and marriage patterns in kinship systems of various sorts - as being governed by rules of conduct conformable to those exhibited by language. Finally, it has influenced cultural theorists concerned with a wide and miscellaneous range of contemporary cultural phenomena - sports, holiday customs, the styles of life of various youth sub-cultures, for example - as well as informing a good deal of recent television and film theory.

In short, there are precious few areas of inquiry that structuralism has not influenced. Whilst, in this respect, it has proved enormously productive, illuminating many areas of social and cultural life, it also has its limitations. These consist chiefly in the overweening ambition of its claims. 'Anyone who says man,' Levi-Strauss has argued, 'says language, and anyone who says language says society'. (Cited in Hawkes, 1977, p.33) The trouble with this formulation is that, in making everything like language and ultimately dependent on it, it becomes impossible to locate anything outside of language which can, in turn, react back upon language and influence its development.

We began by saying that our aim in this course was to argue in favour of approaches to the study of language which would stress the ways in which various forms of language use are shaped by the social relations which prevail between

those involved in them. In some senses, structural linguistics and structuralism are the very antitheses of such approaches in that they argue that language, as a self-enclosed system of rules, not only determines all forms of language use irrespective of social considerations but, in providing a model for other areas of social life, determines the organisation of society too. In spite of this, its ultimately unacceptable face, however, structuralism's achievements have been considerable and have continued to inform the work of those who have sought to break with or go beyond it in developing more socially orientated approaches to the study of language and of other cultural phenomena.

1.2 Statement of study objectives

We shall return to Allison James's study later in the course for, although influenced by structuralism, it also, in some respects, goes beyond it, particularly in its more socially inclined analysis of the contradictory meanings of the word kets. For the moment, however, the example has taken us far enough for it now to be possible to state our aims more fully. They are:

1. To summarise the most salient characteristics of Saussure's structural linguistics.

2. To examine the distinguishing characteristics of structuralism in greater detail and to illustrate its application to a range of cultural forms.

3. To review the principal shortcomings of both structural linguistics and of structuralism.

4. To outline the principles of a more socially orientated approach to the study of language.

5. To exemplify this approach by examining some of the distinctive aspects of the interview conceived as a socio-linguistic form.

In pursuing these aims, we shall also comment on some of the broader theoretical and philosophical implications of structuralism, for these are of considerable importance, as well as those of the various criticisms that have been levelled against it. However, these aspects of the course are intended more to prepare the ground for issues you will encounter in later courses than as issues you will be expected to deal with in the assessment item for the course.

2 LANGUAGE AS SYSTEM

2.1 Structural linguistics

We can perhaps best introduce Saussure's work by outlining its relationship to three fairly common views of language with which you might be familiar.

(a) The first is that language constitutes a system of names, or a nomenclature, which stand for or represent objects and relationships in the real world. In some versions, this is because it is held that there is some natural or intrinsic bond connecting the two. In others, it is because, as a matter of socially acquired convention, language users are agreed that particular words should be taken to stand for particular objects.

(b) The second view regards language as a means for expressing the thoughts of individuals. This implies that such thoughts have an inner, subjective existence prior to their organisation and expression in the external, objective medium of language.

(c) The third is that language constitutes a system for the communication of meanings between language users.

This last position is the one Saussure favours, except that he qualifies it in regarding language as a system for both the production and the communication of meaning in the sense that it both enables meanings of particular sorts to be produced and facilitates their transmission from one language user to another or others. Moreover, as he develops it, this view disqualifies the first view outlined above and significantly modifies the second. Language is not a system of names, Saussure argues, because what the signifiers of language - that is, the articulated sounds of spoken language or their representation in writing - stand for or represent are not objects in the real world but concepts of objects. Moreover, Saussure contends, the relationship between linguistic signifiers - the word cat, say, whether in spoken or written form, and their signifieds - in this case, the idea or concept of a cat - is entirely arbitrary. There is no intrinsic reason why the particular combination of sounds 'c-a-t', and not any other, should have this particular meaning.

This calls into question the second of the views outlined above - the view that language is a vehicle for the expression of our thoughts - since it implies that it is language itself which, in some respects, determines the particular range and organisation of the ideas and concepts which it is possible to have within a particular culture. Ideas and concepts, according to this view, are not things which pre-exist language, somehow secreted in the heads of language users before they are spilled forth into the objective form of language. Rather, the ideas and concepts

that are available to be thought, the meanings that can be intended and received by language users, are themselves ordered and produced by language. Language, that is to say, actively arranges or structures the mental activities of language users rather than being merely a neutral go-between facilitating the transmission of meanings, already formed up somewhere else, just waiting to hook a ride on language in order to be communicated.

The basis for this view can be quite briefly summarised. Saussure regards language as a system of differences in which there are no positive terms. What he means by this is that the signifiers of language mean what they do, not, as we have noted, because there is any natural or causal connection which binds them to the ideas or concepts they signify but because they differ from other signifiers in respects which, for language users, are significant. In English, for example, the signifier cat produces, as its signified, the concept 'cat' (and we shall explain shortly why this is a concept and not a real thing) not because of any qualities that are inherent in the particular combination of the sounds 'c', 'a' and 't'. Rather, it does so because, for English speakers (but not for the users of other languages, such as French or German) this particular combination of sounds is significantly different - that is, different in ways which establish distinctions of meaning - from other combinations of sounds which, whilst similar in some respects, are different in others. The word cat means 'cat', for example, because it is distinguished from a whole series of other possible sound combinations - from can, car and cab, for example, as well as from mat, bat and hat and from cut and cot - and because, when we hear or read the word cat, we are implicitly aware of these other possibilities but rule them out. Put more simply, words mean what they do because they differ from other words.

Saussure's aim in relation to language, conceived as a system of significant differences, was to formulate the rules governing the ways in which linguistic signifiers could be ordered into meaningful sequences (usually referred to as the syntagmatic aspect of language) or could meaningfully replace one another within a sequence (the paradigmatic aspect of language). He was concerned, that is to say, to explain why 'The cat sat on the mat' is a meaningful sequence but not 'Sat the on the mat cat' and why, in the first sequence, 'dog' could meaningfully replace 'cat' but not 'hiccup'.

Let us take a closer look at Saussure's theories.

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Read Jonathan Culler, 'Saussure's theory of language', (excerpts) reading 2. Since many of the concepts contained in this reading will be quite new to you, it might be best to read it through quickly at first, so as to form a general impression of the overall drift of the argument, and then to work your way through it again paying particular regard to the following considerations:

1. Outline the ways in which Saussure uses the terms signifier, signified and sign.

2. 'Each language', Culler argues, 'articulates or organises the world differently' (p.2). In what sense does this view follow from the arbitrary nature of the relationship between signifier and signified?

3. Define the terms langue and parole and the relations between them. Why, according to Saussure, should linguistics concern itself primarily with the study of langue at the expense of parole?

4. Outline the relationship between the synchronic and the diachronic approaches to the study of language. Why does Saussure argue that the latter has no bearing on the former?

5. What does it mean to say that, in language, 'both signifier and signified are purely relational and differential entities' (pp.2-3)?

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Comments

1. Signifiers constitute the material plane of language whereas signifieds belong to its intellectual or conceptual plane. The signifiers of spoken language consist, at the simplest level, of the individual sounds which, at higher levels of complexity, are combined into words, sentences and so on to produce meaningful sequences of sounds. The conventions of the language concerned determine which sequence of sound are meaningful - and, for example - and which are not - abd, for instance. According to Saussure, the signifiers of written language consist of the letters by which the sounds of spoken language are represented and of the ways in which these are combined into meaningful sequences to produce words, phrases, sentences and the like. However, Saussure went to some length to make it clear that the signifier is not just material. In the case of spoken language, he argued, the signifier 'is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression it makes on our senses'. (Saussure, 1966, p.66)

Signifieds are the concepts or ideas which, whether in their written or spoken form, such signifiers evoke. To understand why Saussure regards such signifieds as concepts and not things, as mental representations of objects and not those objects themselves, we need to distinguish between two different levels of language: that of meaning and that of reference. The level of meaning has to do with the relationships between the different signifieds, or concepts or ideas, that are produced by the signifiers of a language. Reference has to do with the relationship between a given signifier (the sound cat) and its signified (the concept 'cat') on the one hand, and objects and relationships in the real world ('real cats') on the other. The reason this distinction is important, as Culler illustrates in some of his examples concerning the contrasting meanings of French and English words, is that signifiers which refer to the same object may often, so to speak, cover it with different meanings. Or, to put this the other way round, the same object may be referred to in different ways by means of different signifiers with significantly different implications for the meaning produced. This may be true within as well as between languages. Take the example of kets. This refers to sweets of particular sorts but, as we have seen, with a special set of meanings that are not in play when other words are used to refer to these same objects - 'children's sweets', for example, or 'confectionary'. These terms produce different concepts of the objects to which they refer - different ways of 'thinking' them and their relationships to other foodstuffs, and different ways of valuing them - than does the functioning of kets within the vocabulary of children.

Sign, finally, is not something separate from or additional to signifier and signified but is their union. It is the material form of the signifier, or sound-image, and the mental content of the signified combined, perceived, by the language user, as two sides of the same coin, like the recto and verso sides of a sheet of paper.

We can clarify this by following the terms in which Saussure developed his argument a little more closely. In his *Course in General Linguistics*, he introduces his discussion of the nature of the linguistic sign as follows:

> Some people regard language, when reduced to its elements, as a naming-process only - a list of words, each corresponding to the thing that it names. For example:

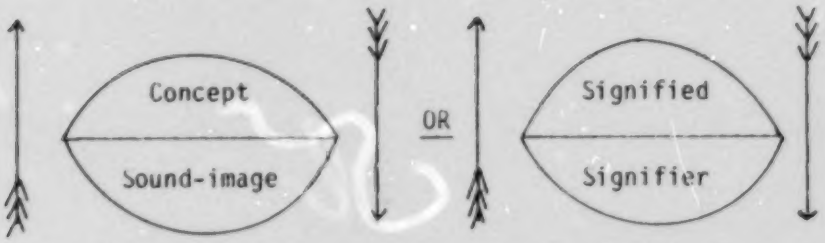
ARBOR

EQUOS

etc. etc.

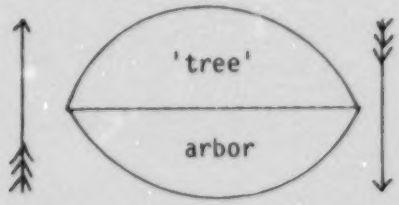
(Saussure, 1966, p.65)

Against this, he argues, the linguistic sign is a two-sided psychological entity which he represents in the following diagrammatic forms where signified and concept and signifier and sound-image are interchangeable:



The directional flows indicated by the arrows are meant to indicate that the two elements of the sign - sound-image and concept, or signifier and signified - are intimately united, each reading the other.

Returning to the example with which he started, Saussure contends that the dual nature of the linguistic sign can best be represented as follows:



Here, the fact that 'tree' is placed in inverted commas is meant to indicate that the Latin word arbor produces, as its signified, the concept of a tree rather than simply functioning as a name for trees in the real world.

2. The arbitrary nature of the relationship between signifier and signified does not simply mean that different languages have developed different words in order to communicate the same concepts or ideas. This would be another version of the view that language is a system of names. It would imply that there was a set of universal concepts, always there, merely waiting to be thought, which different languages convey by using

different words. Saussure's objection to this is that languages differ not just with respect to their signifiers but with respect to their signifieds, their concepts, also. As Culler puts it:

> Not only does each language produce a different set of signifiers, articulating and dividing the continuum of sound in a distinctive way; each language produces a different set of signifieds; it has a distinctive and thus 'arbitrary' way of organising the world into concepts or categories. (p.3)

Different languages, that is to say, classify the world in different ways. The organisation of the relations between signifiers in language does not reflect the way objects and events are 'really' related to one another in the external world. Nor does language reflect the relationships between a pre-given set of universal ideas or concepts. Rather, the organisation of the relationships between the signifiers which form the material plane of a language produces a distinctive set of concepts or ideas on its intellectual plane. It is this set of concepts or ideas which organises the ways in which it is possible for us to 'think' the relations between objects and events in the 'real world'. It is for this reason that Saussure regards language as a system for both the production and the communication of meaning. Language actively produces the meanings it communicates rather than simply communicating or passing on a stock of meanings which is somehow always already there, existing beyond or at the back of language, just waiting to be given linguistic form.

The implications of this view of language are far reaching. It is to suggest that language constitutes a kind of mental grid interposed between ourselves and the real world, making it possible for us to perceive and think about that world in an ordered way but, at the same time, without ever being able to know whether the ordering of reality produced by a particular language conforms to the ordering of reality itself - or, indeed, whether there is such a thing. As the American linguist Edward Sapir observed:

> Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of

> the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (Cited in Hawkes, 1977, p.31)

The consequence is that the users of different languages often inhabit different mental universes, so that categories, concepts and distinctions that are thinkable within one language may be literally unthinkable - have no meaning - within another. We need merely mention that Hebrew has no way of marking the distinctions between the past, the present and the future for the significance of this point to be seen. The same is true of many Aboriginal languages. Different languages produce different ways of classifying nature, too. Here is Levi-Strauss on the system of classification the Navaho Indians used to group animals into different species:

> The Navaho Indians, who regard themselves as 'great classifiers', divide the living creatures into two categories on the basis of whether or not they are endowed with speech. The category of creatures without speech consists of animals and plants. Animals are divided into three groups, 'running', 'flying' and 'crawling'. Each of these groups is further divided in two ways: into 'travellers by land' and 'travellers by water' and into 'travellers by day' and 'travellers by night'. The division into species obtained by this means is not always the same as that of zoology. (Levi-Strauss, 1966, pp.39-40)

As Levi-Strauss proceeds to argue, the Navaho classification of animal species is related to their classification of colours and to the functions which are assigned to different animals within magic and other rituals. We will consider classification systems of this type in greater detail in Course HP08A, *Classifications*. For now, suffice it to note that the existence of such different ways of classifying the world raise considerable problems concerning the nature of knowledge. To put the point simply: who or what is to say that the classifications of animal species proposed by modern zoology are 'right' and those of the Navaho Indians 'wrong'? What would it mean to make such a claim? And who would adjudicate it?

3. Langue is the system of rules governing the relationships between the signifiers of a language, specifying which forms of their combination are

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permissible (and) and which are not (abd). Parole is a particular individual speech act which, combining the signifiers of a language in conformity to the rules of langue, enables a particular intended meaning to be produced and communicated. It is in view of this relationship he posits between langue and parole that Saussure's approach to language qualifies the view that it forms a vehicle for expressing the thoughts of individuals. It is that, but in a more limited sense than is usually implied in that the thoughts which it is possible for the users of a given language to have and express are restricted to those that are thinkable within that language. Parole may be a creative realisation of the possibilities of langue, but it is always regulated by the system of rules which constitute langue and has to be in order to be meaningful and intelligible to other language users. It is in this sense that langue constitutes a hidden structure. It's not visible - it's a set of rules which can't be seen and which language users may not be able to formulate consciously or even be aware of - but which nonetheless effectively organises both what we say and what we think.

One way of understanding this rather abstract point is to pursue the analogy between language and chess which Culler introduces a little further. According to such an analogy, langue might be likened to the rules of chess and parole to a particular move made by a particular player in a particular game. The rules of chess are, of course, abstract and invisible during the actual course of play - just as the rules of grammar are invisible during the actual course of speech - but they are effective in specifying and constraining the moves which individual players may make. To move a rook diagonally, as if it were a bishop, would be the same thing as, in language, saying abd instead of and.

Finally, for Saussure, the study of language should concentrate on the properties of langue since, otherwise, if analysis focussed on parole, it would be at the price of constantly and infinitely extending the object of study in being forced to follow and take account of the never ending individual variations of language use. To pursue our chess analogy again: someone who was unfamiliar with the game would get hopelessly lost if s/he tried to understand it by following and making a note of all the possible different sequences of moves which might take place between opening gambit and check mate. One can only learn and understand chess by acquiring a knowledge of the rules which govern the moves that may be made within it and which specify the function of the various pieces in relation to one another. The situation is the same with language, Saussure argues.

4. Synchronic and diachronic: two difficult sounding terms whose meaning is quite straightforward. To study

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something synchronically is to study its organisation at a particular point in time, to artificially 'freeze' it so that the interactions between its parts may be observed and charted. To study something diachronically is to analyse the various changes to which it is subject as it develops through time. Sticking to our chess analogy: to study the game synchronically would be to study the rules which govern it in its present form; to study it diachronically would be to analyse the various stages and changes through which, from its roots in India, it has developed into its present form.

When Saussure argues that the diacnronic analysis of a system as it changes through time is of no assistance in understanding the make up and functioning of a given system as it exists at any point in time, he is not arguing that such analysis may not be of interest in its own right. His contention is merely that the problems which such analysis addresses and the information it yields do not connect with the problems posed by synchronic analysis. Let us take another example. American baseball derives from the old English game of rounders. The two games have elements in common. Both involve the use of a bat and ball, bases which are occupied by fielders and a system of scoring in which runs are notched up according to the number of times players on the batting side succeed in running round all the bases and returning to their home base. There all similarity ends: the disposition of the field is different in the two games, the role of the pitcher is different, the details of rules relating to scoring and penalties are different. Whilst historically interesting, therefore, the connection between rounders and baseball is of no possible use in understanding baseball. If one wants to understand baseball, one should study baseball and not rounders. Likewise, the import of Saussure's conception of the relations between synchronic and diachronic analysis is that, if one wants to understand the basis of contemporary English, then one should study English and not Anglo-Saxon.

Whilst this might seem a fairly obvious and uncontentious suggestion, it is important to note that Saussure was writing against a background in which linguistics had been dominated by historical approaches. These sought the key to contemporary language use in certain 'primitive roots' whose meaning was held to provide the core of all the signs which had since developed from them. According to this approach, developed in the eighteenth century, the nature of language, in its contemporary form, could only be revealed if one could trace its individual elements back to their origin in earlier use. For example, here is Horne Tooke, an eighteenth century philosopher, arguing that all words in which the sound bar occurs are developments from a primitive root in which the core or essential meaning of bar is 'defence':

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> A bar in all its uses is a defence: that by which anything is fortified, strengthened or defended. A barn is a covered enclosure in which the grain, etc. is protected or defended from the weather, from depredations, etc. A baron is an armed, defenceful, or powerful man. A barge is a strong boat. A bargain is a confirmed strengthened agreement ... A bark is a stout vessel. The bark of a tree is its defence ... (Cited in Culler, 1976, p.56)

The limitations of such a method are obvious.

5. The key to these various facets of language consists in Saussure's contention that, in language, meaning is relational, the product of a system of differences, rather than substantial, the product of a direct connection between linguistic sign and reality, between word and world. In language, as we have noted, Saussure argues 'there are only differences without positive terms'. He goes on:

> Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic (or sound) differences that have issued from the system. (Saussure, 1966, p.120)

The individual signifiers of language mean what they do because they are different from other signifiers. And the system of differences at the level of signifiers produces, at the level of concepts or ideas, signifieds whose meaning is equally the product of the system of differences which prevail between them. Saussure expressed this aspect of language in the following diagrammatic form:

The signifier red, for example, produces, as its signified, the concept of the colour 'red' because it is different from the signifiers green, orange and so on. The resulting concept 'red' marks off reflected light rays of a specific quality as a particular colour which we are conscious of and recognise as a distinctive colour because it is different from the concepts 'green', 'orange' and so on. In this way, a particular organisation of sounds in language organises the colour spectrum in a particular way so as to produce distinctions that are culturally pertinent for us but

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not necessarily so for the users of other languages. Not all societies have the colour categories with which we are familiar; they 'speak' colours differently and hence 'think' them differently.

This particular aspect of the organisation of language has some interesting consequences for the sort of position that we, as language users, occupy in relation to it. For it suggests that language forms a kind of infinite relay system in which, if one is trying to find out the meaning of a particular term, one is forever passed on from one sign to another without at any point being able to slot out from this system to establish a firm bedrock of meaning in a reality located outside language. To put this more simply, if you want to find out what a given word means you go to a dictionary, where you will find its meaning defined by - other words. And if you don't know what these mean, you look them up to find that, again, you will be referred to other words, and so on. You wouldn't be able to establish the meaning of a word in terms of its referent (the object to which it refers) since, unless you know the meaning of the word already, you wouldn't know which objects it referred to.

2.2 A negative example

Since this is perhaps the most difficult and abstract part of Saussure's theory of language, yet the most momentous in terms of its consequences, we might consider its practical implications by way of a negative example: a case of language teaching informed by a quite different perception of the relations between word and world. The case we have in mind is that of Jean Itard, a French clinician to whom there was entrusted 'the wild boy of Aveyron', a pubescent boy, supposed to have been abandoned to the care of wolves from birth, who was discovered in the woods of Aveyron in the late 1790s. The boy, who Itard christened Victor, was entirely lacking in all those attributes of culture which distinguish human from animal life. He could not walk upright, was unaware of sexual differences, insensitive to the distinction between hot and cold, could not understand his reflection in a mirror and, of course, could not speak. 'He was as incapable of speech as an animal,' Lucien Malson writes, 'and uttered only a single, formless sound.' (Malson, 1972, p.73) Itard, very much a product of the Enlightenment, believed that man was not 'born' but was 'constructed' by cultural means. In accepting responsibility for Victor, Itard's purpose was to conduct an experiment with him, to prove, by awakening his slumbering powers through a programme of instruction, that his lack of human attributes was the result of the absence of the appropriate cultural influences rather than of any natural or congenital deficiencies.

In many respects, Itard was remarkably successful in his

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endeavours. He taught Victor how to walk, how to cry, smile, be sensitive to pain. He even taught him acceptable table manners. His attempts to teach Victor language, however, whilst not a total failure, were not notably successful either, as the relevant section of his report to the Minister of the Interior, written in 1807, shows.

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Read Jean Itard, 'Report on the progress of Victor of Aveyron' (excerpt), reading 3, bearing the following questions in mind:

1. How would you characterise the principles which informed the techniques Itard used to teach Victor language?

2. How would you criticise these in the light of Saussure's theory of language?

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Comments

1. The assumptions on which Itard's pedagogic techniques are based take us back to one of the views of language which, as we indicated earlier, Saussure's theory was opposed to. This is the view of language as a nomenclature, a word Itard uses several times; that is, as a system of names which, as a matter of convention, stand in a relationship of one to one correspondence with objects in the real world. Itard's entire method of teaching was designed to enable Victor to attach the right names to the right objects in the right circumstances. His aim, he writes, was 'to establish between the object and its sign a more direct liaison and a sort of identity which would fix themselves simultaneously in his memory ...' (p.2). Learning language, according to this view, is learning the names of objects, one by one, and learning how to attach them to those objects as if they were properties of them. He speaks, for example, of having 'established in Victor's mind the link between objects and <u>their</u> signs' (p.5, stress added).

2. It is clear that Victor not only did not learn how to speak; he did not learn how to use language in any full or meaningful sense at all. All he learned was to imitate - to copy certain forms of writing - and to do so solely in relation to the promise of reward or the threat of pain. There is absolutely nothing to suggest that he ever <u>understood</u> what the connection was between the words he wrote when he wanted a particular thing and that thing, or why his writing that word should have made such an object - milk, say - appear. Indeed, it is likely that such a form of association between word and world could only confer a magical power on the former given its mysterious ability to produce such desired

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effects. Nor did he learn to combine words into meaningful sequences to produce and communicate a meaning.

One need not look far for the reasons. If Victor was unable to use language it was because his teaching had not equipped him to understand the rules regulating its use, in the main because it had concentrated on the relationship between word and world, language and its referents, at the price of the relationship between word and word, signifier and signified, language and its concepts. The missing element in Itard's pedagogy was the perception that words refer not to things but to concepts of things, concepts which derive their meaning from their relations to other concepts. This is shown time and again as, for example, when Victor, having learned to apply the right name to the right object, is thrown off the scent when Itard removes the object from its customary place. Itard attributes this to Victor's being over-literal:

> He had obeyed my instructions to the letter; and as I had limited myself to giving him the names of things in his room, he had assumed that these objects were the only ones to which the names were applicable. (p.4)

Itard concludes that he must then teach Victor 'to consider objects not from the point of view of their difference, but according to their similarity' (p.4), only to find that he then over-extends the range of objects to which, for example, the signifier book might appropriately be applied. Yet how could he have done otherwise? How could he have known, in the first place, that it was not the particular book named that was meant? And, once he'd got over this stumbling block, how could he then be expected to know that the word could not equally be applied to all forms of paper bearing writing? In retrospect, Itard's teaching methods seem perverse. Hirst and Woolley, discussing Itard's teaching methods, conclude:

> His techniques, although constantly inventive and without precedent, were crippled by a philosophical theory of the nature of the sign and the conviction that language use is based on an explicit recognition of the relation between words and things. (Hirst and Woolley, 1982, p.50)

3. Some of Itard's methods derive from other sources than his conception of language as a nomenclature. These are outlined by Hirst and Woolley in their discussion of the general philosophical context within which, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, wolf children came to be regarded as a 'test case' by means of which the degree to which human attributes should be regarded

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as the product of nature or of culture could be examined.

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Read Paul Hirst and Penny Woolley, *Social Relations and Human Attributes*, pp.43-52 (to end of the first paragraph). Since this is meant to serve as general background reading, there is no need for you to do more than simply read this excerpt through.

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2.3 Saussure: some problems

First, let us re-cap on the main points covered so far. These can be summarised as follows:

1. For Saussure, language is a system for the production and communication of meaning.

2. As such, it is a multi-levelled system consisting of two planes, the material (the signifiers) and the intellectual (the signifieds), and their union in the sign.

3. The relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary, and so is the relationship between sign and referent, or between word and world.

4. Meaning is rather produced by the differences and similarities which mark the relations between signs. It is a property of the relationship of word to word, rather than of word to world.

5. It is for these reasons that language actively produces the meanings it communicates rather than passively reflecting a pre-existing stock of meanings.

We have also noted some more general properties and implications of Saussure's views in the light of which we can explain why his approach to language is called structural linguistics:

1. The rules of langue comprise a hidden structure which is nonetheless real in its effects in the sense that it organises the activities of language users. The purpose of analysis should be to decipher the properties of this structure. In thus placing the stress on the conditioning factors which constrain the activities of language users and, in the process, regulate their thoughts, specifying the range of ideas it is possible for them to have, Saussure's approach stands in marked contrast to expressivist theories of language which regard it as merely an external coating into which ideas must be cast in order to be passed on from one mind to another.

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2. Saussure's approach is also structural in the sense that it concentrates on the synchronic organisation or structure of language at the expense of its historical development. His analysis is thus radically anti-historical in the sense that it flies in the face of many forms of historical reasoning common in the nineteenth century according to which the key to the organisation of contemporary phenomena - such as the family, say - was held to be found in their past history.

3. An associated aspect of Saussure's approach to language is the view that the rules of langue totally constrain the activities of language users, leaving the individual with no choice but to comply with its fixed dictates. Saussure was quite emphatic about this:

> The signifier, though to all appearances freely chosen with respect to the idea that it represents, is fixed, not free, with respect to the linguistic community that uses it. The masses have no voice in the matter, and the signifier chosen by language could be replaced by no other. This fact, which seems to embody a contradiction, might be called colloquially 'the stacked deck.' We say to language: 'Choose!' but we add: 'It must be this sign and no other.' No individual, even if he willed it, could modify in any way at all the choice that has been made; and what is more; the community itself cannot control so much as a single word; it is bound to the existing language. (Saussure, 1966, p.71)

These aspects of Saussure's work typify the broader body of theory known as structuralism. This, as we have noted, contends that all forms of culture can be studied as if they were organised like a language. We can now see more clearly what this means. It is to suggest that all cultural forms exhibit regular law-like properties which are analogous to the rules of langue.

Let us go back to Allison James's essay again. She approaches the organisation of meals very much like a linguist would approach the organisation of a sequence of words. What she does is to try to dig out, to make visible, the syntagmatic structure of meals - that is, the implicit rules governing the sequence in which food items may follow one another (fish before meat, but not after) - and the paradigmatic aspects of their organisation - that is, the rules governing which food items may replace one another in a sequence (rice may replace potatoes, but only if cooked in certain ways: not in the form of rice pudding, for example).

One implication of this view is to suggest that the activities of cultural producers of all kinds - writers,

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artists, musicians, actors, film and television directors - are regulated by a structure which constrains the options open to them in the same way as is true for language users and, indeed, for us in our ordinary, everyday activities. This is quite a different view from accounts which regard works of art, say, as the expression of the singular and unique vision or consciousness of their individual creators - a view which has already been critically discussed in Course HP03b, *Authorship*.

We will come back to some of these points shortly. Meanwhile, in case you think he's been having things rather too much his own way, it might be worth briefly reviewing some of the more important criticism that have been levelled against Saussure's work.

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Re-read pp.6-10 of Jonathan Culler's, 'Saussure's theory of language' (excerpts), reading 2, and try to answer the following questions:

1. How does Saussure explain the mechanisms whereby language moves from one synchronic state to another?

2. What part do social considerations play in Saussure's theory of language?

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Comments

1. Saussure's account of the mechanisms whereby languages change and develop from one state to another is particularly unsatisfactory. He attributes the undoubted reality of language change to little more than the effect of a series of accidents, chance mutations which occur in an entirely random and unpredictable fashion. The consequence is that he oscillates between two quite contradictory views of the nature of language use. The first is that the activities of language users are totally constrained by the rules of langue. If they want to be understood, they have no alternative but to speak as these rules dictate they should. But then, and seemingly unaccountably, individual language users may break these rules. Moreover, it seems that there are no limits to the degree or respects in which they may do so, for Saussure attributes such changes to the effect of contingent social and historical considerations - external factors which have no essential connection with language itself. Once such changes of use have been made, however, the rules of langue take over as there is instituted a kind of automatic self-correcting process. The rules are modified to accommodate new patterns of use to produce a new set of rules binding on future language users - until someone breaks them. The result is that, depending on the perspective one adopts,

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language use appears to be either totally regulated or, in a relative sense, quite unconstrained.

2. Although, as Culler insists at some length, Saussure's approach to language is informed by a social perspective, that perspective is quite abstract and remarkably unspecific. For Saussure, language is social simply in the sense that it is not natural - it consists of a set of conventions which vary from one language community to another - and that it has therefore to be learned; it is acquired by social and cultural and not by natural means. This is pretty vague stuff! What is lacking, in particular, is any conception of the ways in which the organisation of language and the patterns of its use might be connected with and informed by concrete social relations of particular types - the relations between social classes, genders or ethnic groups, for example. These are seen as external factors rather than as ones which might have a bearing on the inner organisation of language itself.

Both of these difficulties are connected with a more central problem: Saussure's contention that the linguist must choose between two polar opposites - the study of langue as a system of rules, or the study of parole conceived as individual patterns of language use. Subsequent commentators have queried this assumption. They have argued that it is possible to identify forms of language use located mid-way between these extremes - speech types which are peculiar to certain social groups or which occur where speakers and listeners exist in certain social relationships to one another. These are neither uses of language dictated by the fixed properties of a given body of language rules, nor are they purely individual acts. Rather, they are socially organised patterns of language activity in a fuller and more specified way than Saussure's approach allows. Thus, Allison James is not concerned to understand how kets functions abstractly as a dialect term. She is concerned with the specific pattern of its use by children, a pattern of use which she illuminates by interrogating the relations between the worlds and values of adults and children. In this way, she is able to show how children's usage is organised in opposition to adult usage.

James's approach involves another departure from Saussure, too. We have seen that, for Saussure, language is a system for the production and communication of meaning. This begs an important question in simply assuming that the purpose of language is to facilitate communication. Might it not have other functions and effects when used in particular contexts? The answer is, clearly; 'yes'. The use of kets by children functions quite clearly, according to James, as a barrier to communication between adults and children.

There are, then, considerable difficulties with Saussure's theo[illegible] and we shall elaborate further on these

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shortly. Meanwhile, bearing these difficulties in mind, let's take a look at some examples of the ways in which methods derived from Saussure have been applied in other contexts. In doing so, we shall move some way away from our more immediate concern with the study of language. However, this detour is justified in the respect that an introduction to structuralism, in its broader aspects, will provide a good basis for some of the issues you will be dealing with in later courses.

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3 STRUCTURALISM

3.1 The structural analysis of myth

Let us proceed by way of another example, one which occupies a position of central importance within western culture: the myth of Oedipus.

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Read E.F. Watling, 'The Theban legend', reading 4. This is a summary of the Oedipus myth taken from the Penguin edition of Sophocles's *Theban Plays* - a trilogy organised around the story of Oedipus. In doing so, try to identify some different possible ways in which one might set about interpreting the meaning of this myth.

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Comments

As you might imagine, the myth of Oedipus has been subjected to countless interpretations. Perhaps the two most influential readings are those which relate the myth to a tragic conception of the world and the Freudian reading. According to the former, most prevalent amongst literary critics and philosophers who approach the myth through Sophocles' plays, the myth exemplifies a fatalistic conception of human existence according to which it is hopeless to seek to escape one's foreordained destiny. Oedipus' destiny is confirmed in spite of all attempts to avoid it: indeed it is produced because of these attempts - the oracle's predictions come true because of the confusion about Oedipus' true identity which results from his adoption by Polybus. In this way, a tragic view of human affairs is confirmed: we are foredoomed to suffering as good intentions - the shepherd's compassion - give rise to tragic consequences.

According to the second view, the Oedipus myth is interpreted as a particular way of expressing and coming to terms with the need to subject sexual impulses, or libidinal drives, to forms of social regulation. It relates, Freud argues, to the animosity the son bears towards his father in view of the son's repressed desire for his mother. In Freud's reading, the myth is interpreted as an extended metaphor for a stage of development which all male children must pass through in order to emerge, at the other side of what he calls the Oedipus phase, as individuals whose sexuality has been subjected to social regulation. The myth, viewed in this light, is related to the institution of the incest taboo - the social code prohibiting sexual relations between sons and mothers, fathers and daughters, brothers and sisters - and to the ways in which this is learned by each generation. In both recognising the repressed desires which society must regulate and, in the

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process, repressing them again, the myth, this reading argues, enables individuals to live and come to terms with the contradictory pressures (social and libidinal) through which their sexuality is organised.

These are both fairly familiar interpretations, and ones which seem to be supported, in a fairly self-evident way, by different aspects of the storyline of the myth. If it were suggested that, to understand its true meaning, the myth should be viewed as providing a means of negotiating the contradiction between the belief that mankind sprang, fully-formed, from the earth and the knowledge that human beings are actually born from the union of men and women, your reaction might be fairly incredulous. Yet, this is the view Levi-Strauss advances. There is an isolated reference to a tribe of giants springing from the earth at the beginning of the myth, but it is difficult to see how this informs its subsequent development. If one reads the myth through, as an ordered sequence of events, Levi-Strauss's reading finds little continuing support of an obvious kind and, indeed, seems somewhat wilfully quixotic. Rather than reading it through from beginning to end, however, he reads through it to detect a set of underlying relations, a structure, which is not visible at the level of the myth's surface appearances, but which, according to Levi-Strauss, is nonetheless effective in organising those appearances. Let us see what this involves.

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Read Claude Levi-Strauss, 'The structural study of myth' (excerpts), reading 5.

You might find this quite a difficult reading, mainly because Levi-Strauss spells out his approach to myth in abstract theoretical terms first and then illustrates his approach by discussing the Oedipus myth. It is therefore best to read through paragraphs 1.2 to 4.1 fairly quickly, not worrying too much about ideas you don't understand, and then to go back through these once you have followed Levi-Strauss's reading of the Oedipus myth. There are three main questions to keep in mind during your work on this reading:

1. What part do concepts and theories derived from Saussure's work play in Levi-Strauss's approach to myth?

2. How does Levi-Strauss view the relations between myth and language?

3. Levi-Strauss suggests that one should read a myth in the same way as one would a musical score. What does this mean?

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There are a number of technical terms in the article which you may not understand. Do not worry about this, for it is not particularly important to our concerns here. However, you might find the following definitions of help.

phoneme: refers to a speech sound considered in respect of its functioning in a linguistic system.

morpheme: refers to the smallest potentially meaningful unit in a language; for example, phonemes combined into a word (home) which does not make any sense, if split into smaller parts.

semanteme: refers to morphemes organised into segments of meaning.

traduttorre, tradittore: is Italian, meaning to translate is to betray - that is, that the process of translation always loses or distorts something of the original meaning.

autochthonous: refers to the original inhabitants of the earth in the case of belief systems where it is held that the first men sprang forth from the soil or broke through the earth's crust from a world below it.

chthonian: refers to beings who dwell in or beneath the soil.

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Comments:

1. The answer to the first two questions is contained in the three propositions Levi-Strauss advances in paragraph 2.6.

   (a) The first proposition is:

   > If there is a meaning to be found in mythology, this cannot reside in the isolated elements which enter into the composition of a myth, but only in the way those elements are combined.

   Levi-Strauss reaches this conclusion by sketching out the implications of Saussure's approach to the study of language for the study of myth. Just as the elements of language mean what they do, not because of their relations to things and objects outside language or from their dependency on earlier usage, but by virtue of the relations of similarity and difference between them, so the elements of myth derive their meaning from their relations to one another within the framework of the myth as a whole. They need to be understood

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from the point of view of their functioning within a system rather than being interpreted one by one in an isolated and separated way.

(b) The second proposition is:

> Although myth belongs to the same category as language, being, as a matter of fact, only part of it, language in myth unveils specific properties.

Myth is a part of language in the sense that it is communicated by means of language and, at one level, is made up of the same elements - phonemes, words, sentences - of which language is comprised. However, it is not simply to be equated with language, but is relatively autonomous in relation to it. Although dependent on language, it exhibits specific properties of its own which cannot be derived from the study of language or reduced to it. Here we see Levi-Strauss making 'the structuralist move' - the contention that cultural forms may be studied as if they were organised like a language where such likenesses are not meant to imply a relationship of identity. To study myth in this way thus involves unravelling the respects in which myth is both like and unlike language.

(c) Levi-Strauss's third proposition, accordingly, is:

> Those properties (that is, those specific to myth) are only to be found above the ordinary linguistic level; that is, they exhibit more complex features besides those which are to be found in any kind of linguistic expression.

The constituent units of which myth is comprised, Levis-Strauss goes on, belong to a higher order of complexity than those of language. He accordingly calls these gross constituent units. Yet myth is also made up of the simpler units of language. This suggests that myth exhibits a two-tiered structure; it is organised on two levels at the same time.

This is where the argument gets a little abstract, so let us follow it through step by step. At one level, myth - in its spoken or written forms - consists of the same units as language is made up of, and must do so simply in order to be told. It consists of phonemes organised into words, which are organised into sentences which are then strung together in a particular sequence to relay a particular series of events. So long as one confines one's attention to this level, Levi-Strauss argues, one will see only language.

To decipher the specific properties of myth, he contends, one must therefore look above this level to perceive the operation of a more abstract and complexly organised set of relations between units which operate at another level than that of language.

What is the nature of these gross constituent units which are specific to myth and which distinguish it from language? Levi-Strauss contends that they consist of particular events and aspects of the story told by the myth, not as they function individually but as organised into bundles of relations.

Let us see how this informs his approach to the Oedipus myth. This, Levi-Strauss suggests, should be read as one would read a musical score. A musical score has to be read simultaneously from left to right and from top to bottom. The first constitutes the diachronic axis of musical notation - the ordering of a sequence of sounds through time. The second - a group of sounds that are to be played at the same time, a chord for example - constitutes the synchronic axis of musical notation. Such notations thus represent a bundle of relations between sounds that are to be played at the same time - by piano, violin and cello, for example. If one puts these two axes of music together - the horizontal (diachronic) and the vertical (synchronic) - it can be seen that music consists not of sounds organised into a temporal sequence but of bundles of relations between sounds organised into a temporal sequence.

Myth should be similarly approached, Levi-Strauss argues. To understand its organisation, one should not read it through as a sequence of events organised into a temporal sequence. Rather, one should read through it to group those of its aspects which resemble one another into bundles of relations and then go on to examine how these bundles of relations - rather than single elements - are organised into a sequence. In this way, Levi-Strauss proposes that the constituent units of the Oedipus myth can be slotted into four columns. Each column consists of aspects of the myth which resemble one another; they form a bundle of relations in the same way as, in music, a chord represents a bundle of relations between notes to be played simultaneously. Thus, the aspects the myth Levi-Strauss groups in the left-hand column all refer to respects in which blood ties are carried too far and in the face of social prohibition - Oedipus accordingly breaks the prohibition on incest in marrying his mother, Antigone buries Polynices in spite of an injunction that he should be left unwept and unburied on the field of battle. Those grouped in the second column all refer to aspects of the myth where the demands of blood ties are held in insufficient regard - they are all incidents in which kin kill one another. This introduces a second set of

relationships to be considered: the bundles of relations which are grouped together in the first column stand in a relationship of opposition to those grouped together in the second column.

The same is true of the relationships between the third and fourth columns. Those in the third column imply a denial of the autochthonous origin of mankind: men do not descend from chthonian beings but rather slay them. Those in the fourth column affirm the autochthonous origin of mankind in referring to the laming inflicted on the first men as they struggled through the earth's surface.

For Levi-Strauss, the overall organisation of the myth is revealed in the relations between columns 1 and 2 on the one hand, and columns 3 and 4 on the other. He construes these as systems of difference which resemble one another. The bundles of relations grouped together in column 1, that is to say, stand in relation to those in column 2 in the same way as those in column 3 stand in relation to those in column 4: both are the opposites of one another. It is in the resemblance between these two systems of difference or opposition, Levi-Strauss argues, that the myth works to pose, and simultaneously to evade, a cultural problem: that of reconciling two contradictory theories of human origin. The myth constitutes a way of 'thinking' this problem, but not of resolving it, since it cannot be resolved. The system of oppositions which are generated within the myth is the result of this irresolvable contradition. In this respect, the myth constitutes a way of 'living' this contradiction, of coming to terms with it and yet not coming to terms with it, of facing up to it yet also constantly deferring doing so, of keeping the problem constantly on the simmer intellectually whilst also stopping it from ever reaching boiling point.

Exercise 1

One of the best ways of understanding the principles and procedures of structuralist analysis is by putting them into practice for yourself. We have seen, in the above, how Levi-Strauss breaks down the Oedipus myth into its constituent elements and analyses the relations between them. In another book, the *Raw and the Cooked*, the problem Levi-Strauss is concerned with is that of the transformations between different myths. In a detailed examination of nearly two hundred myths collected from diverse tribes in the central region of South America, Levi-Strauss argues that, although quite different in their content, these all exhibit a fundamentally similar structure. His more particular contention is that some myths are transformed versions of others in the sense that, whilst exhibiting the same logical structure, the former invert all the elements of the latter.

Let us try this out on an example. Levi-Strauss offers a close comparative analysis of two myths collected from different tribes and, on the level of their surface appearances, quite unconnected with one another. The first is a myth from the Carib tribe. This accounts for the origins of diseases and fish poison:

> In ancient times men knew nothing of disease, suffering, and death. There was no quarreling, and everybody was happy. The spirits of the forest lived at that time with men.
>
> One day one of them, who had assumed the form of a woman suckling her baby, paid a visit to the Indians who gave her such a hot and highly seasoned stew that the supernatural woman was burned 'to the heart.' She at once asked for water, but her malicious hostess claimed she had none left. The spirit therefore ran to the river to quench her thirst, leaving her child in the hut. As soon as she had gone, a wicked woman threw it into the pot that was boiling on the fire.
>
> When she got back to the hut, the spirit hunted everywhere for her child and when, on passing near the pot, she automatically stirred the stew with the ladle, she saw the little corpse rise to the surface. Weeping bitterly, she hurled reproaches at the Indians and told them that henceforth their children would die, so that they should weep as she had been made to weep. Women would also suffer pain in giving birth to their children. As for the men, they would no longer be able simply to drain the streams with their gourd containers in order to pick up fish, then fill the streams again so that there would again be an abundance of fish. Henceforth they would have to work and labor and strive in order to poison the pools with roots. Finally, the spirit of the forest killed the guilty woman and offended the children by rudely insulting their mother's memory. It disappeared only when the word 'sweet potato' happened to be pronounced; spirits cannot abide this particular tuber. (Levi-Strauss, 1979, p.279)

Levi-Strauss breaks this myth down into the following units:

1. An honest female spirit visits a hut, not far from which is a river;

2. the woman visiting the hut is a mother suckling her baby;

3. the owner of the hut hides, and selfishly refuses to share, her water supply.

4. The spirit accepts food (but will become thirsty);

5. the human owner of the hut makes the food offered too hot;

6. the woman visiting the hut herself goes to seek cool water in the river and leaves her baby.

7. The owner of the hut boils (but does not eat) the spirit's baby;

8. origin of fish poison.

He then considers a myth from the Mataco tribe which accounts for the origins of birds' coloured plummage:

> The demiurge and trickster, Tawkxwax, was walking along the banks of a river and spent the night there. When he awoke, he was very hungry; he resumed his journey, and about noon he arrived at a house that was surrounded by many pots full of water. An old woman lived there. Tawkxwax went up to her and asked for a drink. The old woman pointed to the jars and told him to drink as much as he wished.
>
> But Tawkxwax made the water very warm and asked the old woman to go and get fresh water from the river. Since she was anxious about her granddaughter, whom she was nursing, Tawkxwax advised her to put her into the hammock. He then murmured magic words, so that the old woman's jar would not fill up before he had had time to finish eating the child. When she reached the river, the old woman tried in vain to draw the water. Meanwhile, Tawkxwax took the child, grilled her, and ate her, then put a stone in her place. He then lifted the spell, the jar filled with water, and the old woman returned.
>
> When she saw the stone, she wept and became angry. The old woman was a wild bee of the moro-moro species (in another version a mason bee). She put the trickster into a deep sleep, and while he slept, she blocked all the orifices of his body - mouth, nostrils, eyes, armpits, penis, and anus - with wax; and she also smeared over the spaces between his fingers and toes.
>
> When the demiurge awoke, he realized that he was swelling up in a dangerous manner. The birds (who at that time were men) came to his aid and tried to open the apertures with axes - that is, with their beaks - but the wax was too hard. Only a very small woodpecker succeeded in breaking through it. The demiurge's blood spurted through the hole and stained the birds with beautiful red colors - all except the crow, which was soiled by the dirt that

blew out from the anus. (Levi-Strauss, 1979, pp.305-6.)

As you can see, there seems to be little in common between these two myths. They narrate different events and account for different things - the origins of fish poison and disease in one case, and of birds' plummage in another. They are connected, however, Levis-Strauss argues, in the respect that the second myth stands in relation to the first myth as its exact opposite, systematically inverting all its elements. See if you can work this out for yourself. Go through each of the units Levi-Strauss lists in the case of the Carib myth and see if, for each of these, you can identify an exact opposite in the case of the Malaco myth. Then compare your answers with Levi-Strauss's comparison of the two myths which you will find at the back of the study guide.

Commentators have differed in their evaluations of Levi-Strauss's approach to myth. Some regard it as merely fanciful and argue that, using such techniques, it is possible to make myths mean whatever one wants them to. There is some truth in this. It could be argued, for example, that the criteria which Levi-Strauss uses to organise the Oedipus myth into a series of columns are quite arbitrary. The aspects of the myth which he groups together in column 1, for instance, are similar in some respects but not in others. Oedipus marrying his mother and Antigone burying Polynices may be likened to one another in the respect that they both represent blood relations which are too close and in breach of social prohibition. However, they are unlike one another in the sense that Oedipus does not know Jocasta is his mother, and thus unwittingly breaches a social prohibition, whereas Antigone buries Polynices in an act of knowing and open defiance. Why should the similarity between the two be more important than the difference between them? In this way, it has been suggested, Levi-Strauss's approach is a priori: he analyses the Oedipus myth in such a way as to make it fit with his own particular interpretation of its meaning.

However, before we pursue these criticisms further, let us consider another instance of structuralist analysis.

3.2 The structural analysis of popular fiction

You may have noticed that Levi-Strauss concludes his discussion with the claim that his analysis is applicable to all versions of the Oedipus myth, that of Freud included. This is an important clue to the level at which his analysis operates. He is not concerned with the particular way the myth is told by a particular narrator in a particular context - for different narrators may tell the myth

differently, ordering its units into a different sequence, starting at the end and working back to the beginning, for instance. He is rather concerned with an invariant set of relations which are operative no matter what the particular order of the telling.

In this respect, apart from being indebted to Saussure, his approach owes much to the work of Vladimir Propp, a Russian scholar specialising in the study of folk and fairytales. Propp's contention, based on the study of several hundred such tales, was that, although their content and manner of being told often varied considerably, they all exhibited a common structure. That is, they were all constructed in accordance with similar principles which organised the activities of story tellers in much the same way as, according to Saussure, the rules of langue organises the activities of language users.

Propp's work has proved influential in relation to the study of more contemporary forms of popular story telling. Umberto Eco's structuralist analysis of Ian Fleming's James Bond novels is perhaps the clearest case in point. Eco approaches the Bond novels in the same way Levi-Strauss approaches myth. He does not analyse the Bond novels individually but groups them together as a whole, treating each novel as merely the specific manifestation of a common structure which underlies them all. The stories the individual novels tell may be different, he argues, and they may tell them differently - some use 'flashback' techniques, for example, whilst others do not. But, at the level of their plot elements and the ways they are related to one another, they are, he contends, fundamentally the same.

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Read Umberto Eco, 'The narrative structure in Fleming' (excerpt), reading 6.

In doing so, try to identify the respects in which Eco's approach to the Bond novels resembles Levi-Strauss's approach to myth. You will also notice that, just as Saussure develops his approach to language via an analogy with chess, so Eco likens the structure of the Bond novels to that of a game. How does this analogy work? Much of the detail Eco marshalls in support of his argument is superfluous to our concerns here, so try to cut through this to grasp the bare bones of his argument.

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Comment

Eco's essay clearly demonstrates the respects in which structuralism calls into question author-based theories of cultural production. There is no suggestion in his approach that the Bond novels should be regarded as somehow expressing Fleming's personal values or opinions. They

might, they might not: the matter is of only incidental significance from a structuralist perspective. Eco's concern is with a structure - systematic and patterned regularities - which manifest themselves in the Bond novels and thus, in a sense, 'speak' through Fleming whatever his intentions were. It is in this respect that structuralism is concerned with an unconscious level of culture - with systematic regularities which effectively condition our ways of thinking, seeing and perceiving whether or not we are aware of the part they thus play in organising our consciousness.

However, we can also see, in Eco's discussion, how structuralist methods may illuminate not only the internal organisation of a cultural form but also something of its lateral connections with adjacent cultural phenomena. Eco's analysis thus tries to do two things. It tries to explain why the average reader finds the Bond novels pleasurable, and it tries to explain the likely ideological effects which might be attributed to them.

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Read through Eco's analysis again with these two issues in mind and note the ways in which Eco sets about them. Then compare your notes with reading 7: Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond: Fiction, Ideology and Social Process* (excerpts), which comments on these aspects of Eco's analysis.

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Comments

Eco explains the pleasures of the Bond novels essentially in terms of their predictability. His explanation of their significance from a broader cultural and ideological point of view is rather more interesting. He contends that this is attributable to the way their structure plays into and connects with, whilst at the same time effecting a specific ordering of, contemporary cultural and ideological concerns - that is, concerns which were prominent when the Bond novels were first written (the 1950s and early 1960s) and, to a degree, still are. It is easy to see how Bond's exploits, in which the virtues associated with the capitalist West triumph over those associated with the communist East, thereby saving the world from destruction, afforded a magical, imaginary solution of the Cold War tensions of the period. At the same time, the fact that Bond also represents the virtues of England - that he is a specifically English hero - enables one to see how the Bond novels, read in the context of Britain's declining status as a world power, particularly in the aftermath of the national humiliation of the Suez crisis, might have provided English readers with an imaginary compensation for the real vicissitudes of history.

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3.3 Limits of structuralism

Our purpose in the two preceding sections has been to show how structural linguistics has provided a model for other forms of cultural analysis. In doing so, we have also tried to show both how and why the study of language, far from being a narrow specialism, has exerted a significant influence on the human and social sciences in general. Whatever its limitations, structuralism does provide a powerful tool of analysis: many contemporary forms of cultural analysis would be unimaginable but for the important contribution of structuralism. Finally, Eco's approach to the Bond novels shows the respects in which structuralist methods of analysis may be combined with social and historical concerns to produce significantly revealing analyses of the ways cultural forms might function in their social environment.

At the same time, the limitations of the method are real and substantial, particularly when applied in its purer forms. We can illustrate this by considering the implication of Levi-Strauss's claim that his analysis of the Oedipus myth could be applied to all versions of that myth, to all the forms of its re-telling. We can test the implications of this claim by seeing what it might mean in relation to the Bond novels which, by a happy coincidence, have often been interpreted as modernised versions of the Oedipus myth. R. Trahair, for example, has offered an elaborate Freudian reading of the novels arguing that, like the Oedipus myth, they offer the reader a way of working out and coming to terms with the universal dilemma of male infantile history, the dilemma of loving the mother but not being able to possess her and of both loving and hating the father. (Trahair, 1976)

Bennett and Woollacott, whilst disagreeing with this view, show that the novels may be read in this way and agree that, at one level, they are re-workings of the Oedipus myth, as the following extract shows:

> It is clear that M functions as a surrogate father in relation to Bond and that the relations between the two are worked through in terms of the Oedipus complex. In M's person the father principle is split as his attitudes toward Bond veer from the stern, demanding and unsympathetic - expressed in his 'frosty voice', his 'steel grey eyes', in his code-name for the cyphers (Mailedfist) - to expressions of fatherly care and solicitude (the exceptional regard he shows for Bond in forgiving him his assassination attempt and giving him a chance to win back his spurs in *The Man with the Golden Gun*). This quality of ambivalence is mirrored in Bond's attitudes toward M. Usually ones of excessive filial respect and obedience ('the man who held a great deal of affection and all of his loyalty and obedience', *Diamonds are*

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Forever, p.15; 'Bond felt a quick warmth of affection for this man who had ordered his destiny for so long', *You Only Live Twice*, p.32) Bond also frequently rebels against and, at times, rejects the paternal authority vested in M:

> A sudden wave of anger poured through him. This was all M's fault. M was mad. He would have it out with him when he got back to Headquarters. If necessary he would go higher - to the Chiefs of Staff, the Cabinet, the Prime Minister. M was a dangerous lunatic - a danger to the country. It was up to Bond to save England. (*Thunderball*, p.34)

However, M does not function merely as a father in relation to Bond. The entire Secret Service is represented as an imaginary household with M at its head, Miss Moneypenny as a mother figure, Bond's fellow 00 officers as brothers and his secretaries - Mary Goodnight and Loelia Ponsonby - as sisters. Miss Moneypenny thus functions as an object of desire, chiefly because she basks in the power that radiates from M - 'the desirable Miss Moneypenny, M's all-powerful private secretary' is how she is introduced in *Diamonds are Forever* (p.13) - but, since she belongs to M, she is placed under an interdiction (Bond's playful flirtation with her is destined to remain forever playful). Miss Moneypenny, moreover, mediates the relations between Bond and M. Guarding the portals to Bond's office, she warns Bond of M's moods, frets when Bond is ill or neglecting his duty and, as the occasion demands, takes the side of the father or that of the son. In *You Only Live Twice*, she responds to Bond's disparagement of M with the 'ill-concealed hostility' (p.27) of motherly reproof whereas, in *Thunderball*, she tries to reassure Bond that M's insistence that he visit a health clinic is not a punishment but a reflection of M's concern for his health and well-being:

> Miss Moneypenny gave a secret smile. 'You know he thinks the world of you - or perhaps you don't. Anyway, as soon as he saw your medical he told me to book you in.' Miss Moneypenny screwed up her nose. 'But James, do you really drink and smoke as much as that? It can't be good for you, you know'. She looked up at him with motherly eyes. (p.14)

However, the incest prohibition applies to all the women in the Service (in Fleming's novels, that is; John Gardner makes bed-fellows of Bond and Ann Reilly - or Q'ute - the Armourer's assistant, in

For Special Services). Little mothers/big sisters to a woman, they are either out of play or put themselves out of play. In *Moonraker*, we are told that Bond and two other members of the 00 section had, at various times, made determined assaults on Leolia Ponsonbyy's virtue:

> She had handled them all with the same cool motherliness (which to salve their egos, they privately defined as frigidity) and, the day after, she treated them with small attention and kindnesses to show that it was really her fault and that she forgave them. (p.8)

Unable to form a relationship within the Service, she seemed destined to a spinster's life:

> But, for the women, an affair outside the Service automatically made you a 'security risk' and in the last analysis you had a choice of resignation from the Service and a normal life, or of a perpetual concubinage to your King and Country ... (but) every day it seemed more difficult to betray by resignation the father-figure which The Service had become. (p.8)

Interestingly enough, the only exception to this rule occurs in *The Man with the Golden Gun* in which, having tried to assassinate M, Bond subsequently possesses Mary Goodnight - in Jamaica, far away from the stern eye of M - in an episode that is replete with allusions to the incest prohibition:

> Bond put his hand under the soft chin and lifted up her mouth and kissed her full on the half-open lips. He said, 'Why didn't we ever think of doing that before, Goodnight? Three years with only that door between us! What must we have been thinking of? (p.52)
>
> (Bennett and Woollacott, op.cit.)

Moreover, Bennett and Wollacott contend, the last two James Bond novels Fleming wrote - *You Only Live Twice* and *The Man with the Golden Gun* - can be read, and seem to have been purposefully intended, as alluding fairly explicitly to the Oedipus myth. In *You Only Live Twice*, Bond is sent away by M to a foreign land (Japan). Once there, he is taken under the wing of Tiger Tanaka, head of the Japanese Secret Service, given another name (Taro Todaroki) as cover for his mission, and entrusted to the care of a Japanese family: that is, he is adopted, as is Oedipus. Injured in the course of his mission, Bond loses his memory so that, like

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Oedipus, he lacks knowledge of his true identity and parentage and stays with those who have adopted him, living the life of a simple island fisherman. Eventually, elements of his memory return. He leaves Japan and travels back to his homeland where, having been captured and brainwashed by the K.G.B. *en route*, he attempts, in the opening pages of *The Man with the Golden Gun*, to assassinate M, just as Oedipus kills Laius on the road to Thebes.

One can see, in this light, how aspects of the Bond novels exhibit the same structure as the Oedipus myth. The names may be different - Bond/Oedipus, Laius/M - but the places they occupy and the functions they fulfill in the unfolding of the narrative are similar. Beyond this, however, the claims of structuralism, in its extreme forms, become somewhat far-fetched. If we took Levi-Strauss's claim seriously, we would have to construe the Bond novels as merely one variant of the Oedipus myth and, thus, to conclude that they were about the same problem: reconciling an autochhonous view of human origin with the knowledge that humans are born from the union of man and woman. Whatever truth there might be in this - and it's pretty hard to see that there should be any - this perspective would not tell us what most specifically distinguished the Bond novels from other variants of the myth.

This takes us to the crux of the matter. What Levi-Strauss analyses is not any particular version of the Oedipus myth, but an abstraction that is said to be common to all of them. But this abstraction has no concrete existence independently of the particular variants of the myth in which it is realised. Whilst it's true that these may exhibit the same structure, they may be equally different in other respects. In this respect, structuralism tends to reduce the analysis of cultural forms to the level of considering the lowest common denominator between them at the price of neglecting their specific differences. It deals, that is to say, with abstract generalities rather than concrete specifics.

The same charge has been levelled against Saussure's approach to language, to which we now return. By concentrating on langue, it is argued, Saussure deals purely with an abstraction which has no real existence, thereby making it impossible to understand the specific differences which exist between different types of language use. In reviewing these criticisms of Saussure, it will be possible to indicate the avenues along which a more adequately and thoroughgoingly social approach to the study of language use might be developed. This, in turn, will prepare the way for a more socially informed approach to the analysis of cultural forms, and particularly to the cultural form of the interview, which we shall examine in the two following sections of the course.

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4 LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

4.1 Towards a social theory of language

We develop our argument in this section by considering parts of an important book in the history of language studies - *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Written by Mikhail Bakhtin in Russia in the late 1920s, but published under the name of V.N. Vološinov, a contemporary collaborator, the book has exerted a very important influence on the subsequent development of linguistics. Bakhtin develops the social approach he advocates in relation to the study of language by criticising two earlier views of language. He calls the first individualistic subjectivism: the view that language is merely the expression in sound or writing of the inner, subjective thoughts of individuals. The second he calls abstract objectivism: the view that language is a system of abstract rules which totally regulates the activities of language users, dictating their speech and, correspondingly, their thoughts. He regards Saussure's work as representative of this approach.

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Read V.N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, (excerpts), reading 8.

Much of this is merely a re-statement of some of the points made in the course so far, for we have made a good deal of implicit use of Bakhtin's work in our earlier discussion of Saussure. The purpose of your reading this here is merely to refresh your memory a little and to pull together some of the different strands of argument that we have so far developed.

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Comments

1. Whilst Bakhtin is critical of these two approaches, he does not argue that their contribution should be ignored or simply written off as irrelevant to the study of language. Rather, he contends that both put their finger on something important about the nature of language, but tend to be misleadingly one-sided in their emphases. He therefore seeks to develop a view which borrows elements from both approaches whilst, at the same time, qualifying them so that their valuable aspects are preserved and enhanced in being made to complement one another and their misleading aspects are cancelled out.

2. The individualistic subjectivist approach is valuable, he argues, in stressing the creative attitude which the language user may adopt in relation to language. It is misleading, however, in that it over-stresses the degree

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of creative latitude that is open to the individual in this respect, as if speech was a gushing forth of individual thoughts and feelings untrammeled by any constraints. It is further misleading in the respect that it assumes that individuals may have thoughts and feelings prior to and independently of their organisation in the form of language. Bakhtin criticises this view in a long discussion of the phenomenon of 'inner speech' (not included in the excerpts you have read). 'Inner speech' is the opposite of 'thinking out loud': it is the process of silently speaking to oneself. Bakhtin's point is that all thought takes the form of 'inner speech' and is, as such, therefore, an interiorised form of language. This implies that thought is therefore dependent on language rather than something which pre-exists and gives rise to language as its expression. To test the truth of this, try having a thought without putting it into words for and to yourself! Abstract objectivism makes the opposite mistake of allowing the individual no room for maneouvre in his/her relation to or use of language: there's no choice but to comply with a system of fixed and incontestable rules.

3. Both approaches are led astray, Bakhtin goes on to argue, because they settle on the wrong aspect of language to study. For individualistic subjectivism, analysis centres on the individual's use of language or, in Saussure's terms, on parole. For abstract objectivism, analysis centres on the system of rules which purportedly regulates all forms of language use, or, again in Saussure's terms, on langue. Bakhtin suggests that a middle way may be found between these two paths if analysis focuses on what he calls the utterance or speech type. By this he means a concrete socio-verbal act, or a particular form of verbal exchange between speakers who exist in definite and specifiable relationships to one another. Analysis, in other words, should focus on language in use in particular social contexts with a view to determining the ways in which particular types of socio-verbal exchange condition the organisation of different speech types or utterances.

4. In view of this, Bakhtin suggests a radically different approach to the problem of meaning. The meaning of a word is not determined purely by the intentions of the speaker. Nor is it totally determined by an iron-like set of language rules. Rather, he argues, the meaning of a word depends on whose word it is, for whom it is intended and in what social context it is uttered:

> Indeed, from whichever aspect we consider it, expression-utterance is determined by the actual conditions of the given utterance - above all, by its *immediate social situation*.

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> Utterance, as we know, is constructed between two socially organized persons, and in the absence of a real addressee, an addressee is presupposed in the person, so to speak, of a normal representative of the social group to which the speaker belongs. The *word is oriented toward an addressee*, toward *who* that addressee might be: a fellow-member or not of the same social group, of higher or lower standing (the addressee's hierarchical status), someone connected with the speaker by close social ties (father, brother, husband, and so on) or not. There can be no such thing as an abstract addressee, a man unto himself, so to speak. With such a person, we would indeed have no language in common, literally and figuratively ...
>
> Orientation of the word toward the addressee has an extremely high significance. In point of fact, word *is a two-sided act.* It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee.* Each and every word expresses the 'one' in relation to the 'other'. I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong. A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor ...
>
> Aside from the fact that word as sign is a borrowing on the speaker's part from the social stock of available signs, the very individual manipulation of this social sign in a concrete utterance is wholly determined by social relations ... *The immediate social situation and the broader social milieu wholly determine - and determine from within, so to speak - the structure of an utterance.* (Vološinov, 1973, pp.85-86)

5. Language, according to this view, is a set of possibilities, not a set of iron-like rules, which the speaker manipulates within particular conditions of socio-verbal interaction. Words, in effect, are conceived as being like counters, pieces of play, within sets of social relations. The speaker's activity, whilst influenced by the requirements of abstract language rules of the type which interested Saussure, is not totally bound by those rules. S/he rather relates

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to language as a reservoir of possibilities - a 'social stock of available signs', as Bakhtin puts it - selecting, using and manipulating words in specific ways depending on who is being spoken to, what the relations between speaker and listener are and the context within which their exchange takes place. This means examining the elements of language not as they function in some abstract way, as Saussure proposed, but as they function in concrete, varying and particular ways within particularly socially moulded utterances or speech types.

4.2 Sociolinguistics

The work of Bakhtin, and the similar work of other linguists, effected a veritable theoretical revolution in the study of language. It meant that language had to be studied as a living social practice, that words had to be studied as parts of the socio-verbal strategies which speakers deployed in specific social situations - different strategies being appropriate to the exchange between equals, say, than those prevailing between superordinates and subordinates. This, in turn, meant that relations of power had to be taken into consideration, that is, that words might be regarded as functioning as instruments of power or as a means of resisting or limiting its implementation. Finally, all of this meant that Saussure's conception of language as a system for the production and communication of meaning had to be revised. The effect which a speaker might aim to produce in a given situation might be quite different from those of communicating an intended meaning as clearly as possible. Indeed, they could be the exact opposite of this.

What does this mean in practice? Let us turn to another example, the work of the American linguist, William Labov, on the speech behaviour of young blacks from Harlem. This is of interest to us in three respects:

1. First, it shows how theories of language, far from being of merely academic interest, have quite definite social implications and effects. His argument is directed against a 'deficit theory' of language according to which children from lower socio-economic groups suffer from a 'verbal deprivation' which helps to explain their poor educational performance. In opposing this theory, Labov is also concerned to call into question the forms of teaching practice it has given rise to.

2. By examining the speech behaviour of young blacks in different social contexts, Labov shows how different conditions of socio-verbal interaction modify the nature of their utterances or speech acts.

3. Finally, the reading introduces us to the subject of interviews, which we go on to consider in the next two sections.

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Read William Labov, 'The logic of nonstandard English' (excerpts), reading 9.

This article ranges widely over a number of related issues. Whilst all of these are of general relevance to your concerns in this course, we want you, here, to concentrate particularly on the ways in which changes in the interview situation modify the speech behaviour patterns of the young blacks concerned. How can such changes be viewed and explained in the light of Bakhtin's comments on the nature of language and language use?

A brief note is necessary on the work of the English socio-linguist, Basil Bernstein, to whom Labov frequently refers. Bernstein is chiefly known for his work on the language behaviour patterns of working class children. He argues that, in comparison with middle class children, whose language use is governed by what he calls an elaborated code - one which enables analytical distinctions and nuances of meaning to be communicated - working class children use what he calls a restricted code, which does not have these capabilities. Since the ethos of schools tends to be middle class, Bernstein argues, working class children often perform poorly in educational terms because their language patterns do not conform to the middle class forms of language use which schools prize and tend to foster. Although Labov's arguments are directed against the theories of Bernstein, and others, it is important to note that Bernstein's ideas have not given rise to the same teaching practices in England as those which have arisen from their use in America. As Labov describes the latter, Bernstein's ideas have been used to support the work of behavioural linguists who view the speech behaviour patterns of young blacks as evidence of a genetic inferiority and argue in favour of quite stringent and puritan forms of teaching as the only effective way of making them learn standard English. Bernstein's theories have no such implication. He regards the language habits of working class children as entirely social in nature. So far as teaching is concerned, he argues that teachers should be sensitive to the fact that working class children may have difficulties in adjusting to the middle class language norms preferred by the school, and that they should not confuse their lack of verbal facility for low intelligence. However, Bernstein does utlimately view the elaborated code as better than the restricted code - as more conducive to developing the cognitive facilities - and this, too, Labov disputes.

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Comments

There is a significant difference between the types of speech behaviour produced by the three different interview situations Labov describes. In the first, an interview between a young black and a white adult male, conducted in the official context of a New York school, the young black's speech is virtually monosyllabic. He is unforthcoming and seems unwilling to communicate. Labov interprets this as a defensive strategy. Given his experience, in similar official contexts, in which his words have been turned back and used against him, the youth's primary aim is to avoid this possibility, to play it safe by saying as little as possible. We have noted that, for Bakhtin, the functioning and meaning of a word depends on whose word it is, for whom it is intended and in what context it is uttered. Applying this perspective to this situation, the functioning and meaning of the words of the young black - words intended for a representative of white authority in an official institutional context - consists not in their ostensible content but precisely in their attempt to minimise communication and bring the, for the young black, risky encounter to a close as quickly as possible. Much the same is true of the second interview, even though both interviewer and interviewee are black. The situation of the third interview, however, produces radically different speech behaviour on the part of Leon, principally because the relations between interviewer and interviewee are made more equal, because the setting is more informal and because a second young black is present to break up the normal interview pattern of question and response. The result is that Leon's speech 'takes off', assuming increasingly extended and complex forms. His use of language shifts gear in a situation in which both the context and the speaker for whom his words are intended have changed. His language, in this context, is not orientated defensively in relation to a representative of adult officialdom (white or black) but is orientated competitively toward the words of a member of his own sub-culture. In the display of verbal facility which ensues, Leon is shown to possess a linguistic competence far in excess of that of the 'monosyllabic, inept, ignorant, bumbling' Leon on evidence in the first interview.

It is worth remarking the respects in which the conclusion Labov draws from this echoes Bakhtin's perception of the importance of examining language use in the context of the social relations which organises the exchange between speaker and listener:

> It means that the social situation is the most powerful determinant of verbal behaviour and that an adult must enter into the right social relation with a child if he wants to find out what a child can do: this is just what many teachers cannot do. (p.7)

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5 INTERVIEWING AS SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PRACTICE

5.1 Summary and review

By a roundabout way, this brings us back to the example with which we started: kets, and its functioning within the speech of children in the context of the social relations prevailing between adults and children and their respective dietary habits and preferences. As we have covered a lot of ground since then, this is a good point at which to take stock of the various issues the course has so far addressed:

1. We have reviewed and commented on Saussure's approach to language. Whilst noting its strengths in comparison with previous theories of language, we have also noted its principal weaknesses - its inability to account for the mechanisms by which languages change and develop, and its inability to come to terms with the real social variability of language use.

2. In considering the respects in which Saussure's work influenced the broader body of theory known as structuralism, we have shown both how and why developments in the study of language have significantly influenced the concerns of the social and human sciences more generally, whilst also pointing to some of the limitations associated with structuralism.

3. Through an examination of the work of Bakhtin and Labov, finally, we have achieved the purpose we initially set ourselves in indicating the respects in which social considerations might fruitfully inform the analysis of language and the varying patterns of its use within different conditions of socio-verbal exchange. The importance of this concept of 'socio-verbal exchange' is that it stresses the degree to which any verbal exchange is simultaneously a part of a social exchange: the two are inseparable.

It is worth adding, perhaps, as we have seen from Labov's work, that issues of considerable importance depend on the ways in which language is thought about and studied. Theories of language, when translated into particular forms of teaching practice, for example, may give rise to quite tangible effects. As in so many areas of inquiry which, from a distance, might seem to be a haven for quiet scholarly work, linguistics, these days, is a field riven by theoretical conflict. It's a battleground of theories which, in the light of the different forms of policies they may suggest in regard to educational or immigration policies, say, have quite markedly different political implications. But then, the import of the approaches we have developed in relation to language is to suggest that language, too, is a battleground in which different verbal strategies encounter and adjust themselves in relation to

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one another. We have spoken so far of 'socio-verbal exchanges'. It is important to add that, sometimes, these are socio-verbal struggles in which the participants may vie for dominance, struggles which, again sometimes, are unequally structured in the sense that one set of utterances has official support and backing (those of Leon's interviewer, for example) with the result that others are forced to adopt a defensive position in relation to them (as was the case with Leon). The speaker's word, as Bakhtin put it, always faces two ways at the same time - out from the speaker and toward the listener - and is organised into the former's utterances in the light of his/her calculations of the words it is likely to draw forth from the listener.

5.2 Forms of interviewing

Our purpose now is to develop and refine the approaches we have argued in favour of by applying them to the study of a range of different interview situations and the particular patterns of language use which they tend to give rise to and support. This choice of topic may surprise you. What, you might ask, is so special or interesting about interviews? And what can be said about them except that they are a technique for eliciting information? In some respects, it is precisely because the interview seems such an unremarkable phenomenon that we have decided to take it as a case-study. Our objective in doing so is to show that, as a particular social activity in which, clearly, language plays a central part, interviewing is various in its forms, functions and effects.

There are two particular respects in which the perspectives we have so far developed in relation to the study of language will inform our approach to the analysis of interviews. First, we shall examine the different verbal strategies which interviewers and interviewees respectively may deploy, locating these within the conditions of socio-verbal interaction produced by different interview situations. In this sense our concerns will be informed by perspectives, derived from Bakhtin, which go beyond Saussure's approach to the study of language. Our second set of concerns, however, seeks to build on and extend Saussure's valuable contention that language produces the meanings it communicates. By extension, we shall argue, interviews are not a neutral means of eliciting and passing on information. Rather, the information which interviews seem to impart is a product of the ways in which they actively construct interviewers, interviewees - and, in some cases, an audience - into a particular set of relations with and to one another.

We shall explore these issues with particular regard to television interviews, especially those associated with current affairs programmes and talk shows. this will have the added advantage of introducing you to some of the concerns of contemporary television analysis, for these will

figure prominently in your future studies. Before dealing with television interviews directly, however, and as a means of highlighting some of their distinctive characteristics, it will repay our attention to consider the range of different practices which may be classified as interviews in order to determine the features they share as well as those which distinguish them from one another.

Exercise 2

At this point it will be useful to carry out a short exercise:

1. First, define what you understand by the term 'interview'.

2. Using this definition, make a list of the main contexts for the use of interviews in modern Western societies. No doubt you will have participated in some of these contexts, and acted as the audience for others. Try to think of at least ten different contexts for interviews (including academic research, which counts - in its various forms - as one context).

3. Once you have established your list, work through it bearing the following questions in mind:

   (a) Do these various contexts for interviews tend to fall into a few broad categories of interviewing? These categories might be defined in terms of the functions of the interview. So try to organise the entries in your list into groups by identifying three or four major functions of the interview.

   (b) Are you confident that, in all cases, what you have listed as an example of an interview might not be described or classified in some other way? In other words, is the boundary between interviewing and other forms of social activity involving language a clearly demarcated one? Or does it tend to be fluid and a little hazy at the edges?

A fairly typical definition might be: An interview is a situation in which one person or persons tries to discover and make known the views and opinions of another person or persons for some specified purpose.

Given this definition, the following chart identifies some instances of interviewing and classifies them in terms of their predominant context or function:

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Context / Function	Examples
1. Research	Academic research, market research
	Social inquiry (Opinion Polls)
	Social administration (Census)
2. Commerce	Market research
3. Recruitment	Job selection interviews, applications for membership (of organisations)
(These examples are related to other practices of testing, examination)	
4. Classification and Treatment	Professional services (medical, social work interviews)
	Professional practices (legal police interviews)
(These examples are related to practices of counselling, therapy, cross-examination, interrogation, prosecution)	
5. Entertainment	Journalistic 'personality' interviews
	Media interviews

Comment

It is apparent, even from this initial set of examples, that interviews operate within a wide range of social institutions and serve a wide variety of purposes. Interviewing would seem to be a very prevalent activity, by no means reducible to a single purpose such as gathering a particular type of information. Thus, in addition to being an important aspect of media entertainment, interviewing is related to practices of counselling, testing, interrogating - in other words, it is tied to multiple forms of the exercise of social administration. One way of identifying distinctions between these forms of interviewing is to recognise that they are bound up with different degrees and forms of social power. There are other distinctions, too. For example:

1. The internal dynamics of the interview might vary considerably depending on whether the purpose for which the interview is conducted is made known to the interviewee or not. They might also vary according to whether the interviewee knows for whose use the information requested is intended. This is often not clear in a great deal of market research, for example,

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where such information is frequently witheld in cases it prejudices the reply of the interviewee.

2. Does the interview have any stakes in the outcome of the interview - as in a job interview - or not?

3. What system of recording is used? Are the interviewee's replies taken down verbatim in shorthand? Does the interviewer make notes on a pre-organised questionnaire form? Is a tape-recorder or a video-recorder used?

4. Does the interviewee have any right of access to or control over the records of the interview?

All of these are aspects of the social and power relations within which different forms of interview are located. As such, they may appreciably influence the verbal strategies of both interviewer and interviewee since they will affect their calculations about how their words will be interpreted and made use of.

Finally, however, it is also clear that some of these examples begin to stretch the definition with which we started. To take an extreme case: how, exactly, would one classify the practice of confession? This clearly resembles some of the interview situations we have identified in at least some respects. It constitutes a highly ritualised form of socio-verbal exchange in which one person gives another the opportunity to unburden his or her thoughts. It differs in other respects, however. For example, it would not count as an interview under our initial definition in the respect that its purpose is not to make known public the views of the person who confesses. But what of the practices of the Inquisition? These consisted of specific forms of interrogation, complemented by techniques of torture, whose very purpose was to make known what were suspected to be the true thoughts and feelings of the accused. This throws into high relief the social and historical variability of the different situations which may be grouped under our initial definition of the term 'interview'. It also demonstrates the degree to which we need to be alert to the differences as well as to the similarities between such situations. The Inquisition and the modern research interview are approximately similar in the sense that both are concerned to discover and make public privately held views, but they clearly differ with regard to the techniques they use to do so as well as with regard to the institutions of which they form a part. We shall return to these considerations shortly.

5.3 Interviewing as 'communication'

Having noted some of the different uses of interviewing, it will be interesting to look at the ways interviews are discussed and understood by professional interviewers themselves. In the library of any educational institution

(and you can check this for yourselves), it is common to find an array of 'how to do it' books and manuals which can be grouped into categories according to the various professions which make use of some form of interviewing: historical and biographical research; sociological research; medical and social work; personnel recruitment, etc. Almost all of these manuals contain discussions of interviewing. However, such discussions are not usually concerned to investigate the historical, social and linguistic features of the situations in which interviewing is done. Rather, they are concerned to improve standards and techniques of interviewing, to train skilled interviewers, and so on. These practical concerns are usually informed by fairly common-sense notions of interviewing which take it for granted rather than perceiving its distinctive social and historical characteristics.

By way of example, here is the introduction to a chapter on 'The Interview' in a standard text-book on sociological methods:

> Just as sampling procedures have developed in complexity and precision far beyond common-sense mental operations, yet are still based on activities common to all men, so is *interviewing* the development of precision, focus, reliability, and validity in another common social act - conversation. When parents attempt to find out what 'really happened in school' by questioning children, they are carrying out an interview. Perhaps most readers of this book have been through a 'job interview', in which they were asked an embarrassing series of questions designed to find out 'What can you do?' Almost everyone has seen a 'whodunit' film, in which the master detective carries out a number of interviews with the murder suspects. He 'probes' more deeply if he believes the answer does not tell the whole story. He asks a series of questions, designed to cross-check a set of earlier answers. He may ask innocent questions, in order to make the murder suspect relax his guard. The prospective purchaser of real estate becomes an interviewer, also, when he questions the salesman about the property, or returns to the neighborhood later in order to question other residents of the area.
>
> Everyone, then, has been interviewer and interviewee at some time or another, and all have listened to interviews. Some of these have been efficiently performed, while others have failed to elicit the information desired. A few have antagonised the interviewee, while others have become the beginning of a fast friendship. Some have been trivial in nature, and others have been of great significance. It is common to feel, after such interviews, that something different should

> have been said. Or self-congratulation follows some particularly shrewd question which cleared up an important ambiguity. Once in a while, also, it is recognized that the person who spoke with us 'felt a lot better' for having talked about his troubles. (Goode and Hatt, 1952, p.185)

It is not too difficult to identify the conception of interviewing which runs through this passage. The sociological interview is located in a general context of interviewing practices, which are themselves said to be rooted in 'common-sense mental operations'. The interview is natural, everybody does it: it is just a slight development from that common social act, conversation.

It is interesting to note, however, that this quite widespread view of interviewing creates difficulties for manuals on the subject as, having defined the interview as simply an extension of ordinary conversation, they also try to cope with the fact that the interview is not simply a 'conversation'. Goode and Hatt are forced to recognise this in another passage:

> In spite of this insistence on the conversational character of the interview, it must not be forgotten that the interview is not merely a conversation. The interviewer's goal is to obtain *information* from the respondent, and he must concentrate upon the respondent. His most efficient method is to treat the latter as a person, giving him a sympathetic hearing. The corollary of this is that the interviewer's attitudes and opinions are not relevant and must not be allowed to intrude into the situation. Again, although it is important for the interviewer to gain the respect of the interviewee, he must not do this by attempting to be 'clever', or by arguing with the respondent. (Goode and Hatt, 1952, p.197)

The really significant questions to be asked about interviewing, as we have seen from Labov's work, have little to do with 'conversation'; rather, they concern a very strict and unequal relationship between interviewer and interviewee, which takes place in a regulated context involving institutional purposes, goals and possibly even rewards and sanctions. Yet in textbook accounts, the comparison of interviewing with 'conversation' constantly recurs, but in a contradictory way. This is made clear by the stress typically placed on the 'rapport' or simulated conversational skills that are judged to be a part of effective interviewing.

> The interview is not simply a conversation. It is, rather, a pseudo conversation. In order to be successful, it must have all the warmth and personality exchange of a conversation, with the clarity and guidelines of scientific searching.

> Consequently, the interviewer cannot merely lose himself in being friendly. He must introduce himself as though beginning a conversation, but from the beginning the additional element of respect, of professional competence, should be maintained. Even the beginning student must make this attempt, else he will find himself merely 'maintaining rapport', while failing to penetrate the cliches or contradictions of the respondent. Further, he will find that his own confidence is lessened, if his only goal is to maintain friendliness. He is a professional researcher in this situation, and he must demand and obtain respect for the task he is trying to perform. (Goode and Hatt, 1952, p.191)

In this respect, interviewing is always posed as a problem in such accounts precisely because, however hard it might try to be so, an interview is not a 'natural' conversation. This is why interviewers have to be trained - trained to behave in 'unnatural' ways (e.g. not to interrupt, argue, or voice their own opinions). Professional interviewing is thus seen as posing a series of related ethical concerns - how far should such unnatural behaviour go? where does one draw the line between good interviewing and deception? These are the debates that dominate the discussions of interviewing as an activity in the professional sociological textbooks and manuals.

What questions might we begin to ask about interviewing which this kind of account fails to consider? One set of questions that could be asked concerns the 'evolution', or history, of different forms of interviewing. If we reject the assumption that interviewing is a 'natural' activity, as universal as conversation, then we might investigate the historical development of interviewing practices in the range of institutions we have already mentioned. It is notable (and indeed, on the face of it, strange) that the manuals on professional interviewing do not see the relevance of discussing how interviewing has come to hold the central and pervasive place it occupies today. Perhaps such an investigation would lead to disturbing reflections on the development of those professions in which interviewing is currently used as a key technique for gaining information, evidence and knowledge. Certainly interviewing has not always appeared so useful, or indeed, so proper. In this regard, it is curious to read in the *Daily News* of 17 December 1869 that:

> A portion of the daily newspapers of New York are bringing the profession of journalism into contempt, so far as they can, by a kind of toadyism or flunkeyism, which they call interviewing. (Source: *Oxford English Dictionary*)

Up to this point, we have noted more than once the diversity of contexts in which interviewing is done, and the

diversity of uses to which interviewing is put. Against the fact of this diversity, we have begun to suggest that there are problems in attempts to formulate a simple or general account of interviewing. By this we mean an account of the sort that proposes a common foundation - such as conversation or communication - for all interviewing.

In addition, as the brief but colourful phrase from the New York *Daily News* of 1869 reminded us, the existence of the current forms of interviewing, and their acceptance as a powerful and legitimate means of enquiry, have not always been as unquestioned as they are today. In other words, interviewing is a relatively recent convention and technique. Rather than being seen to be as natural as conversation or as human as communication, interviewing should be seen as the name we give to a loose set of diverse and specific modern techniques for producing data, evidence and knowledge which, as such, differ from earlier techniques - those of the Inquisition, for example - for the production and public demonstration of truth. In the next section, we pursue this line of argument a little further.

5.4 Some varieties of interviewing

The research interview

Few sociological accounts are available which recognise that interviewing might be a culturally-specific, conventional, and indeed quite peculiar activity. One such account, however, is a speculative essay by Mark Benney and Everett Hughes, in which it is argued that the practices of research interviews - whilst recognising certain conventions of 'communication' - are nevertheless an effect of the need to produce data, for comparative and statistical purposes, within particular social institutions. Furthermore, even those conventions, such as that of a presumed equality between interviewer and interviewee, which allegedly simulate the properties of conversation, nonetheless mark off the interview as being different from normal conversation. In a 'research' interview, for example, the respondent knows that 'he will not meet with denial, contradiction', etc. In other words, what is specific to the interview as a 'communication device' is precisely its lack of resemblance to conversation. Thus, while Benney and Hughes remain attached to the notion of a correspondence between interviews, conversation and communication, their stress on the conventionality of the interview does provide a bridge to a different kind of approach. Indeed, as their essay develops, it begins to indicate the possibility of an unwritten chapter in western cultural history - the development of a particular repertoire or set of interviewing techniques.

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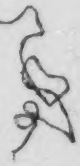
Read Mark Benney and Everett C. Hughes, 'Of Sociology and the interview' (excerpts), reading 10, paying particular regard to the following questions:

1. In comparison with Goode and Hatt, how do Benney and Hughes re-formulate the question of 'conversation' in relation to the practice of interviewing?

2. How does their re-formulation begin to establish a different approach to interviewing as 'communication'?



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Comments

1. The re-formulation by Benney and Hughes of the relation between 'conversation' and 'interviewing' can be described in a number of ways, all of which involve a differentiation being clearly drawn between the two. This differentiation is marked by a stress on the thoroughly conventionalised nature of interviewing, whether in terms of social conventions or historical conventions. In other words, Benney and Hughes represent interviewing as an institutional practice that is both social and historically determined by two particular conventions: that of equality between the participants and that which requires that the circumstances of different interviews be compatible in order that their results might be compared. Despite the potential contradiction indicated by Benney and Hughes, these conventions are the necessary pre-conditions for interview information to be accepted as data. However, these same conventions serve to mark interviewing off from conversation, as shown in the second paragraph on p.1 of the reading. Here, Benney and Hughes identify the 'profit' of interviewing precisely by its distance from conversation; this argument is almost the opposite to that of Goode and Hatt, for whom it is important to stress an identity between interviewing and conversation.

2. In re-formulating the relation between 'conversation' and 'interviewing', Benny and Hughes open up the possibility of historical and sociological analyses of interviewing. Benny and Hughes thus underline the necessarily conventionalised (or 'standardised') nature of interviews, the social relations within which interviewing is done, and the novel historical and social character of interviewing as a means for gaining information. In brief, with Benney and Hughes, we begin to glimpse an approach to interviewing that is centred not on the psychology of the individual participants but on the contextualisation of the practice of interviewing.

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6 TELEVISION INTERVIEWS

6.1 Interviewing as performance

Benney and Hughes provide us with the outlines of an account of the research interview - of its history, conventionality and particularity. But there remains a whole range of interview forms, or quasi-interview forms - tests, examinations and interrogations - which do not follow the conventions they discuss. Unfortunately, we cannot discuss all of these here, but we can sketch out the implications of such an analysis by looking in detail at a particular type of interviewing form.

Our aim in the preceding section has been threefold:

1. First, to establish something of the importance and interest of interviewing as a topic for investigation.

2. Second, to establish the distinctiveness and historical peculiarity of interviewing as a social and cultural phenomenon.

3. Third, to outline some of the factors which distinguish different interviewing situations and practices from one another.

Exercise 3

Look through the list of factors of this sort in section 5.2. Can you think of any other obvious considerations that might be taken into account in distinguishing different interviewing situations and practices?

Most obviously, perhaps, the number of participants and the ways in which the relations between them and their respective roles are organised may clearly make a difference. Recall how, in Labov's account, the addition of a third party significantly transformed the interaction between the interviewer and Leon. Or think of the 'hard guy'/'soft guy' routine of certain forms of police interrogation. As an extension of this point, it also clearly makes a difference whether an interview is, so to speak, an act between consenting participants conducted in private, or whether this exchange is witnessed by some third party or parties. The legal interrogation of a witness falls into this category. This is, in its own way, a form of interview which, like many of the other interviewing forms we have discussed, is a technique for the production of knowledge, of truth. Unlike, say, the research

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interview, however, this takes place in a public context, before an audience, and thus has a quasi-theatrical character with the result, as common usage confirms, that the 'interview' becomes a means of enacting a performance. We thus may say of someone that 'she put up a good performance in the witness stand', implying that techniques of examination intended to usher truth forth into the light of day may have given rise to quite different consequences. This difference between interviews or examinations conducted in a 'closed' context and those conducted in an 'open' context, before an audience, is clearly crucial since the presence of an audience will significantly modify the relationships between interviewer and interviewee, 'skewing' the entire pattern of their socio-verbal interaction in specific directions.

We shall begin to investigate these issues in relation to a field of interviewing where an audience is clearly presupposed - that is, interviews on television. This is a field which raises questions, not only about the ritual forms of TV interviewing, but also about the ways we are positioned as an audience, and about precisely how we are invited to respond to the linguistic exchanges presented in the interview. In considering questions of audience positioning and response, we are in effect extending the scope of our discussion to include not only the conditions within which interviewing can operate but also the particular effects which, for instance, TV interviewing can produce. Finally, we shall arrive at some conclusions regarding the place of interviews within the general output of TV - conclusions which will provide a bridge to the concerns of the next course, HP06b, *Politics and Opinion*. A moment's reflection suggests both that interviews, in one form or another, take a central place in TV schedules and also that they represent a technique of producing information that is directly involved in the formation of 'public opinion'.

Before we proceed further, however, a word of qualification is necessary. To deal adequately with television interviews, it would be necessary to take into account their specifically televisual properties - the way the camera is placed in relation to interviewer and interviewee, for example, has important consequences for the ways in which we, as viewers, are in turn positioned in relation to them. The nature of our 'access' to the interview, how the different participants come across, will vary depending on whether the camera is placed directly before interviewer and interviewee, on whether it looks on the latter from over the former's shoulder, or vice versa, or whether it moves between these three positions. Since we can only examine transcripts of television interviews here, we shall not be able to give these considerations proper attention. However, so long as this qualification is borne in mind, this will not distract significantly from the usefulness of the exercise.

We should also add that most of our examples in this section will be taken from British television. This is because media theorists in Britain have played a leading role in developing the types of television analysis we are concerned with here and because comparable studies of Australian television are not so easily come by. However, we shall make connections with Australian materials wherever possible and, when you come to do the second part of the assessment item for the course, you will have the opportunity to make such connections for yourself.

Bearing these qualifications in mind, the most obvious point to make about TV interviews is that they appear in a variety of forms, in the context of several types (or 'genres') of TV programme. A brief introduction to the institutional context of TV interviews is provided, in the following passage, by Gillian Dyer. Note that Dyer explicitly relates the 'genres' of British TV programmes to certain categories or 'labels' commonly applied to the people who appear in them. It will be useful if you make a note of these various categories, for use in a follow-up exercise.

> The genre of programme in which the interview is placed or which it constitutes (as in the chat show) also serves as a mediator of the interview. News programmes, documentaries, chat shows, etc. determine and are determined by the interviewing styles appropriate to them. But programmes have to do with institutions and what interviews 'mean' involves consideration of the more implicit aims and purposes of the broadcasting institutions: furthermore this institutional context also provides a frame of reference for the interview. When an interviewer asks questions it is in relation to the broadcast institution which he represents and in relation to the group or category of persons that the interviewee represents. Interviews categorise and label people, thus defining them in certain ways. An interesting stylistic feature can be seen in the relative roles and status of the interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer may be a high status Robin Day or Michael Parkinson or a faceless 'non-personality' reporter; the interviewee might be a leading politician or an 'ordinary man-in-the-street'. To a certain extent the degree of control that is inherent in an interview is a function of the relative status of interviewer and interviewee. There are also different styles in the *use* that is made of interviews within programmes, which will determine the style of interviewing and will affect the way that the audience sees the interview and its participants. For instance, it is characteristic of the magazine programme *Nationwide* that interviews with 'ordinary' people or families from all over the country are *used* as evidence to

show, for example, the effect of rising prices or a new piece of parliamentary legislation. On the same type of programme, interviews with 'experts' are used to interpret the complexities of inflation and the economy or the legal system. The former type of interviewee is not expected to be questioned or show any knowledge of the 'experts' area, the latter is not challenged as to his 'personal' feelings about his area of expertise. Interviews can also be used to show people in their own right, as in chat shows. The *use* to which an interview is put will be communicated to the audience by means of a link. The telling style of *Nationwide* link-men is only too easily parodied: 'In order to find out what you the viewers think of the Chancellor's proposed tax rebate and how it will affect your family budget, we ask viewers in Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow and Cardiff how they feel about the news'. Similarly, vox-pop [man-in-the-street] interviews are described in a BBC training document which states that they are short interviews on one specific topic and that one main question should be put to each person involved.

The document also says:

> The man in the street is not qualified to answer questions on whether the Americans should withdraw from Vietnam but he can give us his views on subjects within his personal experience.

The writer of this document seems to have a clear idea about what vox-pop style means; what the interviewee has to say is labelled and categorised as 'lay reaction' rather than 'informed opinion or comment'. The one-question, tightly controlled interview immediately labels the person and the information. The programme link provides the audience with information about the type of interviewee and the type of interview that is to be conducted. Style then, has to do with the relationship between participants, the category and type of interview and interviewee that the programme wants to use and the way that the interviewer and the institution see their role and their relationship with the audience. (Dyer, 1977)

Comment

Dyer's statement makes distinctions between types of interview - which correspond to 'genres' of TV programme and 'categories' of interviewee - according to a notion of differing interview styles. We might have some reservations concerning this notion of 'style'. Firstly, this use of the term 'style' can sometimes confuse the type of interview

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with the personality of the interviewer - as his personal 'interviewing style'. (This confusion is easily made where the interviewer is recognised as a 'media personality' - e.g. Michael Parkinson.) A second point to make about 'style' is that it is simply a descriptive term that identifies the surface features of interviews, and the categories used by professional interviewers themselves. A wider understanding of interviewing as a social practice goes beyond the scope of a 'stylistic' description. The notion of 'style' thus allows Dyer to make broad comparisons between different types of interview (as more or less 'formal' etc.) but it does not address the question of their social and cultural effects.

The next reading is a more extended passage by Dyer, in which she applies her concept of interview 'style' to examples taken from three British TV programmes. This passage will be useful in suggesting some further points for analysis. The three programmes which Dyer discusses are:

1. *Newsday* (a 'serious current affairs programme);

2. *Nationwide* (a 'magazine' programme with 'human interest' as well as current affairs);

3. *Parkinson* (the talk show).

Parkinson has subsequently become an established Australian programme.

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Read the excerpt from Gillian Dyer, 'Teaching about television interviews' (excerpt), reading 11. As you read the excerpt, identify a possible Australian equivalent of *Newsday*, (with the tough, cross-questioning interviewer Robin Day) and consider how the Australian *Nationwide* compares with its British namesake (the British programme is an early-evening magazine which stresses 'human interest' in its news stories).

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Comment

We can pick out three critical points from Dyer's discussion, three features of the TV interview which serve to distinguish between (and thus classify) different types of interview:

1. Firstly, Dyer begins to focus her notion of interviewing 'styles' around definite 'tactics' and verbal strategies used by both participants.

   Such strategies seem to be governed as much by the format of the programme, by the 'rules of the game', as by the individual 'style' of the presenter. Clearly an

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elementary distinction must be made between two general kinds of format: so-called 'live' interviews on the one hand, and 'recorded' interviews on the other. In a recorded interview it is possible to edit out the presence of an interviewer, and to organise the interviewee's statements through editing; whereas in a 'live' interview, the presence of an interviewer is clearly registered and is seen to control the development and timing of the interview. (This remains the case even though most apparently 'live' interviews are in fact 'recorded' in advance of broadcasting.) However a critical set of questions emerges here: how is this 'presence' of the interviewer organised in different types of 'live' interview? And what strategies are open to the interviewee who has to respond to the interviewer's questions?

2. Secondly, it is not only specific tactics and strategies which are governed by the format of the programme - it is also the conventional and recognisable 'voices' with which each participant speaks. As Dyer points out, the interviewer will frame questions according to routine assumptions about the type of interview he or she is conducting. What are these assumptions? They may involve: (a) definitions of the political context within which a 'reasonable' debate is conducted; or (b) what may or may not count as an appropriate 'personal' question. How does the interviewer determine these definitions? In Dyer's view, they are established by conventions of journalism: the interviewer 'knows', from a journalistic training, the appropriate 'rules' for each type of interview. In another passage, Dyer gives some further clues as to the nature of these rules when she refers to studies which illustrate how, in political interviews at election time:

> The interviewer presents himself as the neutral journalist who frames questions in such a way as to suggest that they are not the personal ideas of the interviewer him- or herself. In other words the question is framed in terms of a debate that has taken place elsewhere and at another time. This is achieved by the interviewer using another's 'voice' and not his or her own 'live' voice - the roles of interviewer and politician must not be conflated; the interviewer in the interests of 'impartiality', 'objectivity' and 'fairness' must not be seen to have political ideas as such. (1977)

Our second point then, must be to remember that the interviewer always speaks with a pre-determined 'voice' - even when that voice seems to be 'his own' - that is the voice of the 'space' (the space of truth or impartiality in the news, or the space of the average viewer in talk shows) from which s/he speaks.

3. Thirdly, TV interviews will differ both in whether, and in what way they presuppose an audience. Of course, on one level, all TV interviews presuppose an audience insofar as they are 'public' events (unlike, for example, doctor-patient interviews). But there would seem to be at least three different ways in which this supposition can operate. Firstly, an audience may be present in the studio, as is the case in a talk show, and may directly participate in the interview event. Secondly, at the opposite extreme, an audience may be presupposed, but not directly registered, or addressed. This can occur in documentary films (cf. Dyer's *Nationwide* example when an interview may be used, possibly with the questions edited out, to illustrate a typical point of view or 'way of thinking'). Thirdly however, an audience may be absent from the studio, but still directly registered, and addressed. This is done in current affairs interviews, when an interviewer may speak on behalf of 'the public', and a politician may attempt to frame his answers to appeal to the public audience as represented by the interviewer. Even though it may be physically absent, the audience or public is in fact open to representation by both participants - and in some interviews a conflict may take place over how the audience is defined and who is able to speak 'for it' (as distinct from 'to it'). The question of 'the public' will, in fact, be the central topic of investigation in your next course.

6.2 Analysing a TV interview

On the basis of these introductory points, it should now be possible to analyze a TV interview. At first, this analysis will be descriptive - but we can try to be systematic in our account of the interviewing conventions. Subsequently, we should also be able to make some statements about interviewing practices, and their effects, in TV programmes. Such statements will involve some attention to the position of the audience for TV interviews. But let us first look closely at a particular example, raising questions in relation to the transcript of an interview that we have before us.

This example (Interview A) is taken from a BBC television programme, *Panorama*. This is the BBC's major current affairs programme, a fifty minute slot, scheduled for Monday evenings at 8.10pm. Apart from the screening time, it is therefore a programme somewhat like the ABC's *Four Corners*. The example is a transcript of part of an interview, transmitted on 22 June, 1981, involving the main presenter of *Panorama* (at that time) David Dimbleby, and the then leader of the British Labour Party, Michael Foot. The context for this interview is an impending election for the deputy leadership of the Labour Party; the election involves three candidates: Denis Healy (then the deputy leader, and a 'right-wing' candidate); Tony Benn

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(commonly identified as a 'left-wing' candidate); and John Silkin (candidate of the 'centre-left'). This particular edition of *Panorama* featured a 35 minute documentary film of Tony Benn's campaign for the deputy leadership, after which Michael Foot was invited into the studio to comment. Unfortunately, owing to copyright restrictions, we are unable to print the full text of this interview. We shall therefore focus our discussion on two excerpts - the opening of the interview and its conclusion. The bracketed interpolation between these two excerpts summarises the issues covered in the intervening sections of the interview.

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Read quickly through the transcript of Interview A, reading 12.

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Comment

In the first instance, we should postpone any wider questions about the functions of TV interviews, and simply concentrate on what seem to be the main features, and the 'rules', for this particular confrontation.

This appears to be a complicated example of interviewing practice. It is complicated because there seem to be at least two sets of rules operating at the same time - and both sets of rules are broken, or at least manipulated, by both participants. Firstly, there are rules to do with the specific conventions of interviewing: i.e., an expectation that the role of the interviewer is to ask questions, and the role of the interviewee is to answer them. Secondly however, there are certain rules for what counts as a 'fair' or 'reasonable' question or statement - and at times these rules seem to cut across the conventional question/answer procedure.

Where language is concerned, it is clear that certain verbal strategies are employed. To recognise them, concentrate on the following four points:

1. The interviewer

   Does every intervention by the interviewer take the form of a question? If not, what other verbal strategies does he use?

2. The interviewee

   Is it possible for the interviewee to avoid answering a question? If so, what verbal strategies make this possible?

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3. Interruptions

When do they occur, why do they occur, and what makes them successful?

4. Shifts of Topic

When and why do they occur, and what makes them successful?

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Re-read through Interview A, reading 12.

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SAQ 1

1. Identify one example of each of the following verbal strategies in Interview A:

   (a) an intervention by the interviewer that does not take the form of a question;

   (b) an avoidance by the interviewee of answering a question;

   (c) a shift of topic by either participant.

2. How does each participant recognise the existence of an audience for the interview?

Analysis of Interview A

This interview is located within a certain format of 'current affairs' television: the cross-examination, or interrogation of a politician or 'public figure'.

You will have noted several of the verbal strategies pursued in this interview. The interviewer does not restrict himself to asking questions, nor does the interviewee always answer them - at least according to the way they are formulated. At several points, the interviewee attempts to shift the topic - and a kind of contest ensues (involving arguments and interruptions) over the terms within which the interview is carried out. It might well be possible to analyse this contest as a drama of strategic moves and interventions, but our first concern is to observe some of the verbal strategies employed - and the specific instances in which they occur.

1. The interviewer

We have noted that the interviewer does not simply ask questions, or repeat questions which he feels have not been sufficiently answered. He is also prepared to follow up with his own comments on these answers, and with counter-arguments, disputing the interviewee's statements. In these terms, the interviewer faces the interviewee with a series of challenges which test the credibility of the latter's statements. In a moment, we shall try to indicate the 'voices' or positions assumed by the interviewer, from which these challenges are made.

2. The interviewee

What strategies are available to the interviewee, in response to this series of challenges? In addition to directly answering some of Dimbleby's questions, Foot also attempts three kinds of strategic manoeuvre:

(a) Within the formal conventions of answering a question, he attempts to shift the topic. It does not seem possible or reasonable to ignore a question entirely - but it is possible to exploit the conventions of the interview answer so as to seem to be aswering a question whilst, in fact, negotiating the discussion around to a different set of issues. So Foot continually returns to his wider 'socialist perspective'.

(b) If the interviewer asks a 'leading' question - i.e., one which the interviewee cannot answer without compromising himself - one strategy may be to draw attention to the nature of the question. So Foot persistently comments on the implications of Dimbleby's questions, and the fact that this is a recognisably conventional type of TV interview. His refusal to express a preference for Healey is justified by a strategy of this type [lines 40-44].

(c) If however the interviewer does not ask a question at all, but introduces a follow-up comment, or counter-argument, then it is possible for the interviewee to disagree with the comment, or to reject it.

Here then, we have the beginnings of a description of various verbal strategies mobilised in this interview. In the cross-examining, a number of interview conventions are manipulated by both participants - but they both know the 'rules of the game' (and after much familiarity with these rituals so do we, at least in part). Occasionally, in interviews of this kind, the conventions seem to be stretched to the limit: perhaps part of our interest is derived from seeing 'how far' each participant 'will go'. In a celebrated example, the British Defence Minister (John Knott) walked off the set of a 1982 *Newsnight* interview (with Robin Day) because he felt he had been 'insulted'. A

verbal challenge, it would seem, becomes an 'insult' on those rare occasions when consensus on rules breaks down.

3. The audience

Descriptive approaches to the rules of interviewing are limited in their scope. They tell nothing of the issues at stake in this contest, and offer no analysis of the institutional context in which these rituals occur. On what grounds, then, might our analysis proceed? One way of proceeding, which offers some possibility for development, is to begin to take account of the position of the audience for this interview.

Clearly, it is a public occasion, for which an audience is pre-supposed. This audience is physically absent (for this is a studio interview), but it is nevertheless addressed by both participants. The audience, then, is pre-supposed as a third party in this interview - but what difference does this pre-supposition make? We might suggest that this indirect presence of an audience, once registered, provides one way of making sense not only of the different strategies each participant employs, but also of the conflict between them.

This is because, implicitly Dimbleby and Foot operate with different images of the audience. Each, that is to say, tries to construct the audience differently. Each makes different assumptions about what the audience is or should be interested in - personalities (Dimbleby) versus policies (Foot) and each tries to make his construction of audience interests prevail over the other's. These different images of the audience actively inform the verbal strategies of both interviewer and interviewee, both in relation to one another and in relation to the viewers. Foot's presuppositions about the audience do not merely serve him as a pretext for evading Dimbleby's questions; such evasions also form part of an attempt to produce an audience that will be favourably inclined to Foot's position, an audience interested in policies rather than personalities. In this way, the viewer is drawn directly into the interview and offered a number of different positions which s/he may adopt in relation to it. In this respect, the key issue at stake in the interview becomes: which construction of the audience is likely to be taken by the viewer?

To develop this point further, it is necessary to understand how this presence of an audience influences the different 'voices' with which each participant speaks. It is a matter of understanding the interaction between the participants in terms of the positions they adopt in relation to the presumed audience.

4. The interview and its 'voices' or positions

In this interview we can identify three distinct 'voices' introduced by the interviewer, David Dimbleby. First, he speaks 'from the point of view of the ordinary Labour supporter' [line 2]; second, he invokes the voice of 'reason' [line 28]; and third, he speaks as an experienced and knowledgeable political commentator [line 39] - perhaps, as a kind of political 'expert'. These are the main positions from which Dimbleby speaks in this interview - from which his questions and various interventions are framed.

Now, if we look at the way Foot responds to these positions, we find that he does not respond to them all in the same way. In particular, there is no disputing Dimbleby's second voice (the voice of 'reason') - it is rather the questions which come from the 'ordinary Labour supporter', and the experienced political commentator, that Foot is concerned to contest. Can we detect a consistent position in Foot's responses to Dimbleby, representing a 'voice' with which, and an associated audience to which, he is attempting to speak? We shall argue that Foot does attempt to construct a position for himself in this interview, but that it produces all kinds of difficulties.

Apparently, Foot would like to be in a position where he is able to argue an authoritative and persuasive 'case'. What we are identifying here is a strategy frequently employed by politicians in interviews - to use the interview format as a platform for prepared political statements. One set of conventions to which a politician can appeal in this context is what we might call the historical conventions of political debate. In a debate, each participant has the right to state his 'case', with the audience as a kind of jury. In principle then, the debate should proceed according to rules of 'fairness' and 'reason' - though debaters will also be expected to manoeuvre for positions, attempting to win the audience's sympathy by rhetorical means, as well as its rational judgement by logical argument.

Now a politician who has a 'case' to argue may attempt to introduce these debating conventions into an interview situation. He may appeal to these rules of fairness and reason - his 'right' to have his 'say'. He may also try to neutralise, as far as possible, the position of the interviewer - who would then appear merely as a kind of neutral chairperson, or facilitator (some kind of overlap between the positions of 'interviewer' and 'chairperson' is a common feature of the current affairs format). Principally however, in this situation, the interviewee is obliged to contest those positions taken by the interviewer which (a) directly contradict his 'case', or (b) pre-empt the interviewee's interpretation of what the audience would like to know. In the first instance, the interviewer would no longer be a mere facilitator; in the second, the audience

would no longer appear to be still open to persuasion and the point of the debate - persuasion or dissuasion of an audience - would be lost.

Something of this manoeuvring for a debating position may perhaps be detected in Foot's strategies in this interview. Such a position would be consistent with his emphasis on 'policies', not 'personalities', as the proper focus for political discussion. But perhaps the crucial element in Foot's debating strategy relates to the position of his 'listeners': it is a demand that the audience reconstruct itself in certain ways. In principle, the audience for a debate should have no pre-given interests (not even as Labour supporters) - but should declare itself fair-minded, and capable of balanced judgement. Foot's challenge to Dimbleby, over access to a space to argue the 'socialist perspective', involves a specific appeal to the audience's reason, as well as its patience. It is worth going on to consider what this manoeuvring achieves.

There may be a way in which Foot's strategy in this interview backfires. This statement is based on certain assumptions about how an audience might respond to his appeals, outlined below. You might care to test this hypothesis if you do not agree with these assumptions.

Note, first of all, that although Foot contests two of Dimbleby's 'voices', he does not finally displace them. Dimbleby repeatedly comments on Foot's answers from the point of view of the 'ordinary Labour supporter' he constructs at the beginning of the interview. Similarly, Dimbleby's 'expert voice' directly contradicts Foot's argument and is not always convincingly refuted by Foot. Moreover, these voices are to some extent reinforced by the institutional position which Dimbleby holds. As a professional interviewer and political commentator, Dimbleby is accorded a right to ask questions on the audience's behalf, and he has a right to cross-question the interviewee (particularly if he quotes his 'sources'). Thus, in institutional terms (in terms of conventional journalistic practice), it is the interviewee here who is breaking a rule. For all his appeals to 'fairness' and 'reason', Foot thus puts himself in a deviant position with regard to the conventional format of the current affairs interview.

The fact that an interviewee breaks the rules does not automatically undermine his 'case'. It depends on the audience's commitment to those rules; this in turn raises the question of the audience's relation to the broadcasting institution itself. But there are two main reasons for suggesting that in this interview Foot's intervention might be counter-productive. Firstly, if Dimbleby's journalistic voices do retain some institutional credibility then, at the very least, the audience will have an alternative framework with which to interpret Foot's intervention. In these terms, politics is understood as a drama of 'personalities'. The view of politics as consisting mainly of personal

ambitions, attacks and loyalties is one Dimbleby consistently returns to in other passages of the interview. 'Mr Foot', he asks in one place, 'why haven't you declared your support for the present deputy leader who has loyally served you ...?'. If these formulations continue to hold, despite Foot's attack on them, then the audience may be disposed to interpret his position in personal terms. Why is he attacking the interviewer? What has he got to hide? And so on.

But it is not just a question of the audience taking Dimbleby's side against Michael Foot. It is not just a matter of Dimbleby's institutional credibility or popularity as a journalist. What counts decisively in the end, in this interview, is the fact that it is an interview. The audience does not have to grant Dimbleby any more credibility than Foot in order to take the position which Dimbleby's voice proposes. One does not have to agree with him that politics is about 'personalities' (as opposed to 'policies'). It is enough to be the audience for this interview, where 'proof' is given (if proof were needed) in the interview situation itself that personalities are at the centre of this form of conducting politics.

In short, it is suggested that there is a practice here by which both participants are represented as 'personalities', whatever they might say. As viewers, we witness a dramatic conflict of 'personalities' taking place before our very eyes. We see two individuals, locked in a verbal contest, asserting their respective positions. This is a clear example where the form of the verbal ritual itself determines the effects of the statements it dramatises.

6.3 The current affairs interview: television and politics

Our concern in the previous section has been to illustrate the respects in which the more immediate social relations prevailing between interviewer and interviewee may, in the case of a current affairs interview, regulate the nature of the exchanges between them. We have also considered some of the more immediate effects which may be attributed to the regular format of the current affairs interview: namely, the view that politics is essentially a matter of personalities. We now go on to broaden and extend the range of our discussion by considering

(a) the wider social relations which bear in upon the situation of the current affairs interview; and

(b) the view that current affairs interviews implicitly reinforce the parliamentary system, particularly with regard to its tendency toward consensus politics.

We shall do so by considering an analysis of another *Panorama* interview - in this case, a round-table discussion

between two television presenters and three politicians. This analysis, however, goes beyond the immediate situation of the interview to consider the ways in which the different verbal strategies deployed within it are formed and shaped by the relationships between broadcasting institutions, the state and the sphere of party politics.

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Read Stuart Hall, Ian Connell and Lidia Curti, 'The "unity" of current affairs television' (excerpts), reading 13, as far as the heading 'The Panorama Case Study', paying particular regard to the following questions:

1. What, according to the authors, are the main sources of conflict between broadcasters and politicians with regard to current affairs programmes?

2. In what respects does this analysis cast further light on the verbal tussle between Foot and Dimbleby in Interview A?

3. What is the significance, according to the authors, of the role of the presenter in current affairs programmes?

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Comments

1. The central source of tension between broadcasters and politicians, it is argued, is attributable to the role which the former play in mediating the contact between the latter and the electorate. The politician is often dependent on broadcasting institutions as the most effective way of reaching the vast mass of the electorate, but always at a price since, in doing so, s/he must submit to the conventions of the current affairs format. These often run contrary to the interests of the politician in the sense that the conventions of current affairs programming - to secure a balanced, impartial, reasoned debate of matters of public concern - constrain the degree to which the politician is able to address the audience directly in an attempt to present and win viewers over to his or her political perspective.

2. It is clear, in this light, that the conflict between Foot and Dimbleby in Interview A is not attributable to their personal differences but rather has its roots in the institutional relations between broadcasting and the political system. In this respect, the current affairs interview offers a good illustration of Bakhtin's maxim that:

> The immediate social situation and the broader social milieu wholly determine - and determine from within, so to speak - the structure of an utterance. (see p.47)

The utterances or verbal strategies of Foot and Dimbleby, as they struggle to determine whose definition of what the interview should be about will prevail, are thus organised by the contradictory interests of broadcasting institutions and political parties. These are the broader social relations which specify the conditions of socio-verbal interaction within this encounter, organising the strategies of interviewer and interviewee.

3. The media personalities of different presenters may significantly influence the expectations of the audience and thus inflect the general conventions of current affairs television in different directions. The television image of the presenter is thus a factor the politician must take into account if s/he wishes to manipulate the interview situation to his or her own advantage.

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Continue reading 'The "unity" of current affairs television' from where you left off up to the heading 'The "unity" of current affairs'. In doing so, bear the following questions in mind:

1. How does the way in which the topic of national unity is set up tend to support a consensus view of politics?

2. By means of what verbal strategies, according to the authors, is Callaghan able to break the rules of the interview situation to his own advantage?

3. Try to identify any points of similarity and/or difference between Callaghan's behaviour and Foot's in Interview A.

****

Comments

1. The presentation of the topic implicitly equates a threat to the parliamentary system of two party rule with a threat to parliamentary democracy which is, in turn, implicitly equated with a threat to the unity of the nation. The question of restoring national unity is thereby presented as one and the same thing as restoring the status quo of two party parliamentary politics. The terms of the debate are thus, in effect, 'rigged' so as to systematically prefer some political options over others - those of Plaid Cymru and the Scottish Nationalist Party, for instance - which, as a consequence, are systematically marginalised.

2. Callaghan exploits the opening created by McKenzie's reference to Labour Party dogma to appropriate the role of chairman. He is able to check the efforts of

McKenzie and Charlton to resume control of the debate, thereby placing himself in a very strong position vis a vis Whitelaw and Steele who, in being obliged to answer the questions put directly by Callaghan, are thereby also obliged to debate within the terms of reference set by Callaghan.

3. Callaghan also put the presenters in their place when he reminds them that it is the politicians who have to answer for their policies to the electorate. This is another way of saying that the broadcaster's role is merely to facilitate the politician's access to the electorate, and that he should not try to step out of this purely auxiliary service role. Foot attempts a similar strategy toward the end of Interview A when he states that not even Dimbleby's questions will deter him from putting policy choices before the electorate. Implicitly, Foot here tries to 'put down' Dimbleby by reminding him, and the viewer, of the 'higher duties' which the party leader must bear in mind compared with the 'lesser' concerns of the television presenter.

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Now read the final section of Stuart Hall, Ian Connell and Lidia Curti, 'The "unity" of current affairs television' (excerpts), reading 13. In what sense is it argued that current affairs television tends to reproduce the parliamentary system and the conditions of the struggle for power which characterise the parliamentary system?

****

Comment

The argument here is to the effect that the very form of current affairs interviews such as we have been examining tends to reinforce a purely parliamentary conception of politics. Precisely because such interviews do not favour any particular party's point of view but attempts in a neutral and impartial way, to accord spokespersons of the major parliamentary parties the opportunity to present their views to the electorate, current affairs interviews operate in favour of parliamentary democracy without favouring any particular political tendency within the parliamentary democratic framework. It thus performs a vital service to the main parliamentary parties in supplying the appropriate conditions in which their different policies can be brought before a mass public. This tends to limit the range of legitimate political opinion to the range of differences between the main political parties. The views and policies of extra-parliamentary political forces are, by the same token, either excluded from the terms of debate or accorded a position in which their concerns are represented as being of a purely tangential significance to the major political issues of the day since the power to define what these are or should be is accorded solely to the main parliamentary

parties. Current affairs interviews are thus governed by a rational-choice model of the viewers as potential electors. It is assumed, that is to say, that, come polling day, the electorate will make a rational choice between the competing policy formulations which have been put before it, courtesy of television, by the major political parties. But this model operates only on a limited basis in the sense that the very format of current affairs interviews restricts voters' choice to two or three options. All other perspectives are marginalised. In this way, current affairs television implicitly colludes with the parliamentary system in actively producing and organising the electorate's perception of the division between central and marginal political issues and forces.

6.4 Television's personality system

Let us recap the argument so far. We stated, at the beginning of our discussion of interviewing (section 5.2), that our concern was to analyse different interview situations using perspectives derived from both Bakhtin and Saussure. With regard to the former of these concerns, we have thus shown how current affairs interviews can best be understood as a verbal contest between interviewer and interviewee where the conditions of such contests are supplied by the institutional relations between broadcasting institutions and the system of parliamentary politics. We have seen how the particular form of socio-verbal exchange represented by the current affairs interview is organised from within by the operation of these broader social relations and the ways in which these influence the orientation to one another - and to the audience - of interviewer and interviewee respectively.

With regard to the latter concern, it can now be seen that, just as Saussure argued was the case with language, the current affairs interview actively constructs or produces the meanings it communicates rather than simply passing on a set of pre-existing meanings. It is not a neutral vehicle for transmitting the views of the interviewee to the audience. Rather, it actively constructs a particular conception of politics just as it actively constructs particular positions for interviewer and interviewee as well as for the audience. In these respects, the current affairs interview is a cultural form of a specific sort, involving specific patterns of language use which, just as they are influenced by social and political considerations, give rise to particular sets of social and political effects.

In this section, we continue to explore this active productive capacity of the television interview whilst also broadening the range of our discussion to consider the type of television interview situation represented by the talk show.

The final reading for the course is taken from a recent article by John Langer, 'Television's "personality system"'. Langer's point of contrast is with the 'star system' produced within the film industry (particularly Hollywood). Television, argues Langer, does not produce 'stars', so much as 'personalities' - familiar faces, 'ordinary people', people with eccentricities and foibles, just like ourselves. In part, TV 'personalities' seem to be a function of programme schedules - the identification of programmes with names, 'anchor men', familiar faces repeated again and again. In Britain, David Dimbleby would qualify as this type of 'personality': he guides and represents the audience, and we recognise him. In Australia, names such as Michael Carleton, Mike Willesee, Mike Walsh, George Negus and Jane Singleton might be cited.

However, in Langer's account, television is also a medium for the production of 'personalities'. By this formulation, Langer indicates that 'personality' (at least on TV) is something produced specifically by television, a TV effect, rather than a kind of pre-existing and general psychological attribute. TV doesn't simply present 'personalities' it finds elsewhere - rather it constructs its own 'TV personalities', by its own specific means, in its own particular ways.

One of the most important of these ways is interviewing - and in this context Langer refers to the format of the 'talk show'. In the 'talk show', individuals are invited to make personal disclosures and revelations, before an audience, which they would not make elsewhere. Thus, politicians who appear on talk shows may be judged not in terms of their policies or practical achievements - rather it is a question of how 'sympathetic', 'authentic' or 'genuine' they appear, as 'personalities'.

Langer's article raises many interesting points - particularly in its emphasis on the systematic production of 'TV personalities'. We might approach the article with a couple of observations - the first of which is suggested by our previous work:

1. When he discusses interviewing, Langer focusses exclusively on the 'talk show', which he regards as a medium for personal disclosure. Yet as we have seen, other types of interview, in other types of programme, may construct 'personalities' and not necessarily in exclusively 'personal' terms.

2. When he talks about a personality system, Langer points to the possibility of a consistent strategy in several types of TV programme. This suggestion may be right - but if it is, it raises questions about precisely what is achieved by television's 'personality system'.

****

Read John Langer, 'Television's "personality system"' (excerpts), reading 14, bearing the following questions in mind:

1. What is the key distinction drawn by Langer between the cinema 'star system' and the television 'personality system'?

2. Identify the ideological function performed by the television personality system.

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Comment

1. Whilst the cinema 'star system' stresses the distance between the star and everyday life, the television 'personality system' reduces that distance as far as possible, making the personality seem familiar, regularly and routinely present to the viewers.

2. Langer argues that the television personality system serves to personalise power, thus seeming to reduce social and other differences and inequalities by a sort of domestication of the personalities shown. This process, according to Langer, masks the real and unequal distribution of power, class and prestige by humanising and familiarising all personalities.

Two further comments can be made on Langer's article:

1. Langer gives a restricted account of the production of 'personality'. He defines it in two ways: (1) in the construction of presenters as TV personalities; (2) in the revelation of personality through personal disclosure in certain forms of interviewing ('talk shows'). But from our previous work we have seen that 'personality' may be reproduced through other types of interviewing (e.g. current affairs). We could therefore argue that Langer's concentration on the talk show produces some unfortunate effects. 'Personality' is defined too literally, as the 'personal' sphere - an intimate, private space, away from public life. So the talk show interview is seen as a place where 'the cares and burdens of high office or public life are momentarily set aside' (p.3).

There seem to be two main problems here. Firstly (as we have seen), it is not true to say that 'personality' is constituted only in 'personal' forms. It can be produced in current affairs interviews where politics is defined, and demonstrated, as a 'conflict of personalities'. This leads to a second point: that the political sphere (public life) and the personal sphere are not necessarily in opposition. It may be

conventional to see high office as an 'impersonal sphere', and some politicians (like Michael Foot) may set 'policies' against 'personalities' - but equally there are many politicians who are only too pleased to use personal reference, and even disclosure, as a way of making political points. In general then, 'personalities' abound in public life; in politics - in some forms of political argument - the 'personal' is regularly included as a rhetorical convention.

2. The second point concerns the way Langer tries to account for television's 'personality system', in particular the answers he gives to the questions of how this system is reproduced and what its effects might be. You should have noted that Langer's answers to these questions largely revolve around his use of the term ideology. So the 'personality system' produces ideological effects: it is part of the repertoire of 'dominant ideologies'. Perhaps this is true - but according to the way in which the term 'dominant ideology' is defined so there would be different accounts of the working of television's 'personality system'.

   Langer himself gives two kinds of definition of the ideological effects of 'personality'. The first definition rests on the questionable opposition he has constructed between the 'personal' and the 'political'; in these terms, he argues that an exclusive concern with 'personalities' obscures the "real unities of power, class, prestige and interest" (p.5). In this familiar definition, 'ideology' provides a false picture, a 'mask', which prevents people perceiving 'real' social processes.

   However, Langer also produces a second (and more interesting) hypothesis on the ideology of personality. In this hypothesis, 'personality' is not a false picture of the real world, so much as a key effect of a set of techniques for maintaining an audience that accepts a certain picture of the way that world is. 'Personality', according to this view, does not 'mask' the 'realities' of power and prestige - on the contrary, it makes them visible, but in a certain and acceptable form. In this account, 'personality' provides a means by which the powerful and famous become visible and familiar to us, the television audience. At the same time, it is a mechanism for securing our interest in, and even our consent for, these positions of power and prestige. In short, in this account, TV's 'personality system' is one way of constructing a political consensus.

At the end of our investigation of some of the components of the context of television interviewing, we are thus confronted with two different accounts of the ideological effect of 'personality'. We might note, of course, that these two accounts can both appear, despite

their mutual contradiction, in the one article. Recognition of this possibility of co-existence does not, of course, imply that the analysis of the effects produced by the current forms of television interviewing has been taken to its final conclusion.

It now remains to tie together the work of the course as a whole, showing how our discussion of the linguistic conventions that make up part of the context of the television interview in which 'personalities' are constructed can be related to the earlier sections of the course.

7 CONCLUSION

This course has been somewhat broad in its scope, ranging from a discussion of the Oedipus myth to the James Bond novels, from the interconnections between language use and dietary customs to different forms of language teaching, from the situation of research interviews to that of television interviews. Nonetheless, although our examples have been various, we have had a consistency of purpose in view. Our main aims can be briefly summarised as follows:

1. We have sought to introduce you to a number of different theories concerning the nature of language and its use, drawing your attention to their respective strengths and weaknesses.

2. We have been concerned to identify the respects in which the study of language has implications for other areas of inquiry, and especially to show both why and how contemporary developments in linguistics have assumed a position of central significance within the human and social sciences more generally.

3. Finally, we have examined a number of interview situations from the point of view of the different forms of language use they embody.

Throughout the course, however, a number of more general issues have been in play, but only on the margins of our discussion. In concluding, therefore, we shall try to make these more explicit and, in doing so, to extrapolate some of their further ramifications and implications.

SAQ 2

At the beginning of section 2.1, we outlined three familiar and widespread views of language which, in various ways, we have since qualified or called into question. Summarise each of these views in a single sentence and, in a couple of sentences, state the main difficulties associated with each of them.

In addition to the specific criticisms that it has developed in relation to specific theories of language, this course has had a more radical cutting edge in that it has called into question the possibility of there being any such thing as a general theory of language which might claim universal validity. Instead, we have argued, analysis should focus on specific language practices - on language in use in specific contexts - with a view to doing two things. First, analysis should seek to reveal the respects in which such language practices are shaped and moulded by the social relations - between speakers and listeners or, although this has not

been quite so central to our concerns, between writers and readers - within which they are located and of which they form a part. Second, analysis should be equally concerned with the effects of such practices - with their possible consequences for those who take part in them or on whom they are inflicted. Such consequences may concern the ways in which different forms of language use shape the thoughts, feelings, perceptions and values of language users. Or they may concern the respects in which specific language practices may function as forms of social control or domination or, alternatively, as ways of sidestepping or resisting the control aspects implicit in certain forms of socio-verbal interaction.

In short, the course has argued against attempts to reduce the variable patterns of language use to a point of unity such as might support the development of a general theory of language, and in favour of an approach to language practices which stress their differences and particularities. Two general consequences of this approach might be noted:

1. It produces untidy conclusions

To stress differences, for instance when studying the linguistic aspects of interviewing practices, means that analyses tend to end by noting the intersections of a diversity of factors: the relations between interviewing and particular power relationships, the historically changing conventions of interviewing, the different effects and functions of the interview, etc. Unlike analyses that claim to reach through to a point of unity and sameness (e.g. to an all-encompassing notion of language as 'communication'), the differentiated analyses as presented in the course end with an untidy set of differences, not a single, neat and comprehensive explanation of a language use. Whilst this lack of a neat, all-encompassing theory may seem unsatisfactory, it is preferable to obtaining such neatness at the price of neglecting real differences in language use.

2. It de-composes general categories

In noting the untidiness of conclusions that follow from a differentiated analysis, we are reminded of the several points of the course where potentially generalisable categories (that is categories upon which general explanations or theories could be based) were questioned and, in effect, de-composed across the array of different factors identified in a contextual analysis. In this way, a generalisable category such as 'communication' did not come to be recognised as a fundamental process in all interviewing. Instead, the preference for differentiation drew attention to the diversity of social, historical and linguistic factors that bear on a particular language practice such as interviewing. An important implication of admitting

this diversity is that the investigation of a language practice will always tend to push beyond the limits of a single discipline or field of knowledge. One might summarise this matter by means of the following two slogans:

(a) the study of a linguistic practice such as interviewing should not be regarded as a purely linguistic study;

(b) the history of language should not be regarded as a purely linguistic history.

The stress on the importance of differences and particularities constitutes an important element in the concerns of the part-time programme as a whole. However, there are also some more specific ways in which the perspectives developed in this course will inform your future studies and, indeed, have implicitly informed some of the courses you have already studied. We have thus suggested that language does not reflect some pre-existing reality, but signifies it; that is, that it actively produces a system of concepts which forms a grid of intelligibility, dividing up and classifying the external world in particular ways, organising our thoughts and perceptions, as well the ways in which are able to relate to and interact with one another. However, this is true not only of language. You may recall the debates to which you were introduced in Course HP02a, *The Bush Mythology*, concerning whether literature should be regarded as a reflection or as a production of reality. Similarly, in the later parts of this course, we have suggested that television personalities are actively created and produced by TV - that they are a particular effect of television and that, as such, they have precious little to do with the 'real personalities' of the persons whose image is produced and manufactured in this way. When we come to consider other cultural forms in later courses, we shall thus be concerned to illuminate their active, constructive role in organising the very terrain on which our consciousness and experience can be shaped up, formed and given expression.

Moreover, we shall also be concerned with the effects which might be attributed to different cultural forms in terms of the different positions in which they inscribe us or which they may it possible for us to adopt. We have thus seen how television interviews don't just speak to an audience without, at the same time, constructing the audience they address, producing a place which we, as the viewers, are presumed to occupy and from which the interviewers then speak as if on our behalf. Clearly, these perspectives are more generally applicable. To give one example: think of a church service, of the ways in which the relations between minister and congregation are organised and of the way in which the ritual elements of such services - the forms of intonation used by the minister, the call and response pattern of the exchanges

between minister and congregation - produce, as their effect, a heightened sense of spirituality.

Perhaps the best way of making these rather general concerns more concrete, however, is by way of noting their relevance to the very forms of the part-time programme and the respective positions and possibilities which these construct for us, as teachers, and you as students. For, not only has this course been about language: it has also been conducted within and entirely by means of language. Its various components - this study guide, the set readings, the tutorials associated with it, the assessment item you will submit - involve us, as teachers, and you, as students, in definite and particular forms of socio-verbal interaction with one another. You might find it fruitful to think about some of these in the light of our earlier discussion of various interview situations. Take the tutorial form, for instance: what are the distinguishing characteristics of this as a particular form of socio-verbal interaction? how are the speaking positions of tutor and student organised? what are the various forms of verbal strategy open to them? Is the particular form of language practice which we define as a tutorial purely concerned with the discovery and communication of truth? Or are other things going on? It would do no harm for you to inspect the various forms of socio-verbal interaction in which you are involved simply by being a student. The same goes for course planners, writers and tutors, too. Who knows, the results of such inquiry might suggest lines along which our teaching and your learning could be improved!

At another level, this course might enable you to reflect on a practice that has, no doubt, sometimes irritated you: the use of jargon or, less perjoratively, of specialist languages in the course materials and associated readings. No doubt, some of these may be unnecessary. But not all of them. A moment's reflection on the concerns of the course may help to explain why. If it is the case that different languages map out different systems of concepts which, in turn, determine the ways in which the world is 'thinkable' for the users of a language, then it follows that, in learning a different language, one is also learning a different way of 'thinking' the world. The reverse of this is also true: to learn a different way of 'thinking' the world, one must learn a different language. It is no use trying to 'think' French without first learning to speak French.

By extension, in order to acquire the different ways of 'thinking' the world which a particular science or discipline claims to offer, it is necessary to learn the language of that science or discipline. This is particularly clear in the case of the natural or physical sciences. In order to understand the concepts which these propose, it is necessary to learn their languages, since the former are the product of the latter. A knowledge of physics and a knowledge of the highly specialised language

of physics are thus one and the same thing: if one has not assimilated and become competent in the latter, one simply cannot have any scientific understanding of physics - only a rough and ready layman's translation of that science.

Although their languages are rarely so specialised or exact, the same is true of the human and social sciences. Economics, sociology, history, literary analysis: the forms of knowledge which these disciplines claim to offer are available only within the languages which they propose. There is, however, an added difficulty here in the respect that many of these disciplines produce their key concepts by using words which have a more ordinary, everyday currency in quite particular and precise ways. This means that, in order to understand these concepts, it is often necessary to unlearn the concepts associated with the more ordinary usage of a particular word in order to grasp the concept associated with its specialist use. At least, it is necessary to distinguish clearly between the two. Take, as an example, the word class. This has an ordinary, everyday use, and another, quite particular and contrasting usage in Marxist theory. An instance of the former might be when someone says 'I'm not class minded...' What this means is that the speaker is inclined to value all people equally, to treat them as persons in their own right, no matter what their income, say, social standing or power. In Marxist theory, however, class refers to a particular concept - to a particular position in the social relation of economic production - which enables one to distinguish between different groups of people according to whether they own the means of production (the bourgoisie) or whether, on the contrary, they lack any means of self-subsistence and so must sell their labour power and to the highest bidder (the working class). Now, neither of these uses of class is wrong and the other right. But they are different. It is an instance of the same word producing different concepts in different contexts of its use. The practical point of this, of course, is that it is quite possible for someone to fail to understand the Marxist concept of class because, through familiarity, the word class automatically carries, for that person, the meanings associated with its ordinary usage. If someone makes the inference (and it has been known to happen!) that they don't believe in class (sense 1), therefore Marx's theory of class (sense 2) is wrong, that person has simply failed to learn and understand the language of the body of theory s/he is criticising.

This is, perhaps, a suitably practical note on which to conclude the course. Words, and the particular contexts of their use, matter. To the extent that this degree programme aims to introduce you to bodies of thought that are new to you, it will, in the process, introduce you to languages - or uses of language - that are new to you. The writing is on the wall: such languages are not incidental to your concerns but central to them.

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FURTHER READING

There are a number of different directions in which you might follow up your work for this course. If you are interested in Saussure, you would find the rest of Jonathan Culler's *Saussure* both interesting and readable. Likewise, Terence Hawkes's *Structuralism and Semiotics* provides a useful introduction to the more general aspects and applications of structure linguistics. On Levi-Strauss, E. Leach's *Levi-Strauss* is an accessible introduction although it is a little prejudiced against Levi-Strauss. If you would like to be acquainted with Levi-Strauss's work at first hand, his *Totemism* is both short and engaging. Finally, on television, the article by D. Morley and C. Brusden in T. Bennett et al. *Popular Television and Film*, usefully complements the work you have done on television interviews.

Check the bibliography for full details on Culler, Hawkes and Bennett. For Leach and Levi-Strauss the details are as follows:

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ANSWERS TO EXERCISE 1 AND SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Answer to exercise 1

Levi-Strauss construes the relations between the two myths as follows:

	1.	2.	3.
Mataco myth	A deceiving male spirit is walking near a river not far from which is a hut;	the owner of the hut is a grandmother looking after a baby;	the owner of the hut does not conceal, and generously offers, her water supply.
Carib myth	An honest female spirit visits a hut, not far from which is a river;	the woman visiting the hut is a mother suckling her baby;	the owner of the hut hides, and selfishly refuses to share, her water supply.
	4.	5.	6.
Mataco myth	The spirit asks for a drink (although he is hungry);	the visiting spirit makes the drink offered him too hot;	the owner of the hut goes off to the river to get cold water for her visitor, and leaves her baby.
Carib myth	The spirit accepts food (but will become thirsty);	the human owner of the hut makes the food offered too hot;	the woman visiting the hut herself goes to seek cool water in the river and leaves her baby.
	7.	8.	
Mataco myth	The spirit grills and eats the baby belonging to the owner of the hut, or devours it raw;	origin of the birds' colored plumage.	
Carib myth	The owner of the hut boils (but does not eat) the spirit's baby;	origin of fish poison.	

As you can see, the Mataco myth is like an upside down version of the Carib myth in which the structure of the latter is preserved intact but all its individual elements have been inverted.

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Answers to Self-Assessment Questions

SAQ 1

1. The examples given here are not the only ones in the transcript. Others will be considered in the commentary in the study guide.

   (a) Dimbleby's second remark [lines 17-18] is not a question. Rather, Dimbleby rebukes Foot for introducing a diversion, tries to steer him back to the initial question and, in the process, seeks to remind Foot that it is his (i.e., Dimbleby's) job to determine what topics should be discussed in the interview. Dimbleby's third intervention [lines 24-26] takes the form of a counter-argument to the effect that the public cannot be expected to be interested in the more general issues Foot wants to discuss so long as there is acute dissension within the Labour Party. Likewise, Dimbleby subsequently directly contradicts Foot [line 39].

   (b) Foot largely avoids answering Dimbleby's opening question [lines 5-16] and tries to introduce an entirely different set of issues into the discussion. Subsequently, he directly refuses Dimbleby's invitation to return to his opening question, saying, in effect, that he will answer it only in his own good time, after he has outlined his 'socialist perspective'. Finally, Foot refuses to be drawn by Dimbleby's invitation to express his support for Healey [lines 35-38].

   (c) In effect, throughout these excerpts, both Dimbleby and Foot seek constantly to change the topic without either of them ever being entirely successful. Foot consistently tries to evade Dimbleby's questions and to introduce other issues which, however, he is never allowed to develop fully as Dimbleby continuously interrupts in an attempt to return Foot to the question he is evading and to introduce a new one.

2. Dimbleby recognises an audience for the interview from the very start by claiming to speak from the perspective of the 'ordinary Labour supporter in the country' [lines 1-2]. Foot's most explicit recognition of the existence of an audience takes the form of an attempt to by-pass Dimbleby in addressing the audience directly [line 48]. In thus appealing to the audience above the head of the interviewer, Foot's purpose is to try, once again, to shift the topic.

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SAQ 2

The three views of language are:

1. Language as a nomenclature, or system of names, where words are viewed as being attached to objects by some natural or intrinsic connection.

2. The view that language is a means for expressing the thoughts and feelings of individuals.

3. The view that language constitutes a system of communication, a means for relaying messages between language users.

The principal difficulties associated with these are:

1. The signifieds of language are not objects but concepts and, since the relations between signifier and signified tend to be arbitrary and conventional, words thus mean what they do because of their differences from other words rather than because of any intrinsic bond between them and the objects to which they refer.

2. The difficulty with the second view is that it suggests that individuals may have thoughts and feelings prior to their organisation in language whereas, in fact, it is language itself which specifies the nature and limits of the thinkable.

3. Language not only communicates meanings; it also produces the meanings that are available to be communicated. Moreover, not all forms of language use can be made readily intelligible if it is assumed that their primary purpose or function is that of communication.